THE MUSICIAN

Frank Waters

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The Musician

A Legend of the Hartz Mountains

Frank Waters

Boston

Richard G. Badger

The Gorham Press

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Preface.

Many years ago, while still a child, I read a wild German legend, which made an indelible impression on me. Name and author alike I have forgotten, and nearly all else of the tale, beyond the basic facts of the bridegroom-musician's compact with an evil power, and a ruin consequent thereon.

In so far as these two basic ideas go, the following poem is founded on the tale. Otherwise, it is wholly my own. The grotesque horrors of the original I have changed, and elevated to the plane of tragedy and pathos. I have expanded my theme until it touches on heaven at its zenith, and on hell at its nadir, depicting man and woman as living centres open to the direct influence of Godhead on the one hand, and of the Adversary on the other. In the bride, I have drawn the portraiture of a perfect womanhood; and, in the bridegroom, that of a most imperfect, but potentially a noble, manhood, wrecked by a perverted devotion to false ideals and aims, but finally retrieved by a noble repentance. In this poem, too, as in "Shadows Of The Soul," I have especially striven to convey some realization of that divine delicacy and purity of passion which should characterize the love between the sexes—that love which is, by choice, God's own favorite figure of expression for the love which should unite the creature with its Creator. In fine, I have illustrated the worse-than-uselessness of all art which is not derived from God; and I have taught the omnipotence of prayer to raise even the most desperately fallen. But here, as elsewhere, I have inculcated the moral aim of my work as an artist, not as a preacher; merely shaping a perfect work of art informed with a soul of spiritual meaning self-expounding.

FRANK WATERS.

August 8th, 1895.

The Musician

PART FIRST

The quiet German village—'mid the trees
Dreaming it sate upon the aged knees
Of the old mountains watching over it
With sheltering tenderness, as grandames sit
And gaze upon their children's children fair.
But for the human souls that habit there,
The mountains cannot shield them, but may be,
As those do choose, or haunts of Deity,
Or of the dwellers in the deep, who build
New hells on earth till time shall be fulfilled.

Who has not read, erewhile, some wizard tale,
Such as, in youthful hours, doth paint all pale
The ruddy cheek with heart-delighting fear
Of terrors grown artistically dear—
Who has not read some legend wild and weird
Of the Hartz Mountains, in whose bosom seared,
'Mid sunless glens far sunk from noonday-shine,
Or on sheer steeps whose shaggy fell of pine
Bristles a horror, demon dwellers haunt,
In varied semblances of were-wolf gaunt,
Or mountain hunter gloomed with stormy stain,
Or (deadlier thus) o'erfeathered with the grain
Of earth's fair angelhood, in form of her,
Man's complemental being, apt to stir
The pulse of evil as of good in him,
Since, erst in Eden, grown of glory dim,
She dwindled from her primal loveliness?

Yet, well I ween, the Maker—who did dress
With veiling love her beauty, when of shame
The breath inclement, breathing on the same,
Made shrink her blossomed sweetness, 'ware of flaw—
Did also add thereto a robing awe
Of virgin holiness, and left her still
So excellent a beauty as may thrill
With image of His own the heart of man.

So thought the bridegroom, as he turned to scan
His blushing bride, where on the village green
She sate beside him, with her virgin mien
All blown in roses, and her heart at strife,
Being all maiden yet, though wedded wife,
And wavering 'twixt a maiden's lovely shame—
To which the open heart seems open blame—
And the new freedom of a love wherein
God re-creates an Eden free from sin.

Where the Hartz Mountains from their heights descend,
Till, close below, their rugged billows blend
With woodlands flowing southward—in a nest
Rimmed by the circling steeps behind, whose crest
Of nodding pine shook voices down below,
Caught from the spirits of the wind, that blow
The organ forests to a music such
As elemental hands of dæmon touch
Draw from the stops of nature—sheltered well,
The qûiet village lay. In front, down fell
The shelving mountain to the plains below,
Leaving a portal whence the eye might go
On quest through murmurous woodlands rolling far,
With bosky lawns between, unto the bar
Of the horizon, where they broke into
The deeps unfathomed of the shoreless blue.

Around the village, in its rocky bay,
A quiet reach of grassy sward outlay,
With here and there a tall grove islanded,
Which took the challenge of the pines o'erhead,
And gave an answer from the woods beneath.
And when the airs of summer made to breathe
Their millioned stops of finer voice through all
The instrumental forests, till the ball
Of the orbed planet through its thrilling round
Seemed spiritualising into sound,
So full a soul of music drenched the air
As though the heart of God, made vocal there,
Grew audible in harmony divine.

Other it was when winter from the pine
Tore hearts of howling discord, slaying sense
Of music through their groaning fibres, whence,
With jarring shriek and roar, a thousand hells
Seemed loosened, as the deep's abysmal wells,
Flooding, had bellowed upward from below,
With voices of apocalyptic woe—
A woe that thundered all to one dread note
Of horror grown concordant, in the throat
Of Heaven's compelling justice forced to be
A unison of wrath's tremendous key.

So was the mountain village suited well
To cradle a musician: heaven and hell
Sent voices from beneath, around, above,
Wherein all chords divine, from wrath to love,
Gave utterance, in the mighty Master's art,
To every modulation of His heart.

And in the bridegroom of this summer day
A sentient spirit quickened through the clay—
A soul of swiftest aptitude to take

Large echoes to it of all notes that make
The music of creation's giant scale.
When still a child, the moaning of the gale,
Heard, high o'erhead, along the shaggy steeps,
Or shaking, down below, the forest deeps,
Tuned all his being to its pitch of power.
Nor less, when summer, like an opening flower
Of many-petalled music, rendered out
Full fragrances of sound his nest about,
This fledger of unfeathered harmony
Did feel the breathings of a Deity
Make sway the rhythmic pulses of his life
To most sublime accordance. Long at strife
His growing genius laboured in the boy,
A-toil to find some voice of woe or joy
Such as might echo back each mighty note
Shaking his being's deeps the most remote,
Like winds a-tremble on a shoreless sea.
Until befell, by chance or destiny—
Permitted growth of natural event,
Or fruit direct of God's sublime intent—
A string-compelling nomad, dying in
The boy's rude birthplace, left his violin,
A legacy of gratitude, to him,
For tendance kindly rendered. Seraphim,
And Cherubim, and Powers, and Thrones above!
Ye minstrel ones, upon the heart of love
Sweeping its chords to music ever new,
Thrilling to It as It doth thrill to you—
Ye can conceive what felt the boy when first,
With rapture kin to yours, from silence burst
His liberated spirit, pouring out
Along the echoing strings, as with a shout
Of new-made Dominations to their King.
O, how his heart broke out in thundering
As of a voiceful tempest rolling far

Along the roaring mountains plumed for war,
Their fell of forests threatening at the gale!
And then, anon, the dying numbers fail,
Swooning into a music airy-fine
As liquid murmurs dripping from the pine,
When summer in their blood bids dream of love.
He played by mandate from the Height above,
And inspiration of a chosen seer:
To him, the scale of harmony was clear
By intuition of a mind that scanned
Its octaves, ruling through a master-hand.

So, as he grew, the fastnesses of pine,
And the strong places of the mountain-line,
Where solitude was fortressed, knew in him
A boon companion. From their shadows dim,
Vast adumbrations, as of love, and awe,
And wrath, and stormy raptures such as draw
A life from stormy passions of a soul
Builded to power in all save self-control,
Were shaken o'er his spirit, nursing it
As at the breast of tempest, foster fit
To build a master, but a fearful one!

Yet none the less made echo hours of sun
A softer music through his heart at times;
Wherein were voices of the silver chimes
Of softly-falling waters; breathings low,
As of a woodland when the south, at blow
In tenderest zephyrs, kisses it to heart,
That all its notes, new-sexed by God's own art,
Sleek from their rugged bass to sweetness fine
Of woman-softness, as the dryad line
Of Greece were not the fable of a dream.

But more his soul was pitched to power supreme

Than to a key of sweetness; and, to him,
The haunters of the Hartz, its dwellers dim,
Possessed no terrors: one with them he stood,
An elemental spirit of the flood,
The forest, and the mountain, and the storm,
A shouter with the thunder, and a form
That revelled in the lightning, and a heart
Moulded to these, and moulding them to art.
What of the midnight darkness reckoned he,
Or of its demon striders? Ecstasy
Uplifted him the touch of fear above,
And shot him headlong to a heaven of love!

A heaven of love, but builded o'er with storms!
A heaven of love, but tenanted by forms
Of cloudy angelhood, which yet might raise
A war with heaven, till, shaken from the ways
Of light, his toppling spirit so might fall,
Down-ruining from a height celestial.

Through all his stormy boyhood, he had trod
Apart from men, yet, walking not with God,
Had held, for sole companions of his heart,
His violin, voiceful nature, and his art.
At thickest midnight of the mountain-side,
When ghostly horrors rode the air astride,
When from the horrent crags and caves out-stole
Vague breathings of the demon and the ghole,
And from the giant pines black terrors fell
In bodied glooms o'er many a rugged dell
Of shaggy solitudes no human foot
Save his alone would wake to ominous bruit
Of any earthly wanderer through the night—
Oft, in the very heart of dim affright,
Planted upon some massy plinth of stone,
From upper heights by burly winds o'erthrown,

Deep in the bosom of some savage glen,
Where scarcely noon, to common mould of men,
Might lend them nerve to enter, for some tale
Of demon horror turning manhood pale—
There, where the soaring steeps shot heads on high
That shook a pluméd menace at the sky,
And gloomed against the starlight trembling down
With heart all shaken by their brows a-frown;
Or, haply, seated on some prostrate pine,
Some monarch of the mountains, hurled supine
By the tall hurricane in grapple strong,
And bleaching, now, a skeleton among
His sombre brethren groaning at the sky—
In haunts so weird, while midnight held the sky,
And demonhood the mountains, there he drew
Such kindred births of music to the view
Of spirit-apprehensions, from a womb
Of thought so dreadly like, in power and gloom,
Their own perverted essence, that, I wot,
They made the wild musician on the spot
Free of their dark domains—a brother, he,
Who yet might swell their ghostly company.

In vain his father—for, alas! he stood
To lack a mother's love—the stubborn mood
Of headstrong genius strove to shape and bend
After more lowly fashion. How the trend
Of a young torrent may a shepherd's crook
Train to the courses of a placid brook,
When—swelled in secret at some fountain-head
By spout of driving tempests where they shed
A heart of deluge on the stabbing steeps—
In growing strength the youthful giant leaps
At gambol with the pebble boulders thrown
As feathers to his play, till, mighty grown,
He shakes the mountains in his thunderous glee,

A Ruin full-waxed to wanton liberty?

As well the simple mountain sire might sway
That torrent genius, once it broke to play,
Growing and swelling to a rush of power
That fed on thoughts let loose in thunder-shower.
The rugged father, (sprouted at the knees
Of frugal happiness and thrifty ease;
With something in him of the mountain air—
Strong though untutored; simple, stern, and bare
Of any touch of genius), stood aghast
To see his single issue hurtling past
All fence of healthful custom of his kind;
Not idle, but as errant as the wind,
As hard to chain a meted end unto.
And, finding straitest admonition drew
But sequent inattention in its train—
Not for the boy, though strong, was cross of grain,
But that his soul would soar at unawares
From common element to loftier airs —
Anon with force the father strove to tame.
Whereat, the spirit of the son became
Untamable as torrents in the spring.
And then, before their souls from bickering
Could pass to larger strife, the father slept.
No tear, above, his wayward offspring wept,
But inly mourned, and sternly in his heart
Entombed a sorrow, and in breathing art
Piled over it a large crescendo woe.
For his not of that softer earth a-flow
With spring of kindly tears to any touch
Of sorrow laid upon it: rather such
As needs the buffet of a Deity
To set its granite-prisoned waters free,
In bursting floods that threaten, as they start,
To pluck from rooted hold a mountain-heart.

Little the wealth inherited by him.
And now, perforce, in sweat of brow and limb,
He dewed rough labour to a recompense,
So as his mountain brotherhood. And hence,
Forced to a contact with his kind, he grew
A marvel to his fellows, thrilling through
Their rugged spirits, many an evening hour,
With mighty storms of music, loosed in power
Of a portentous genius, master-born,
Holding all technic knowledge 'neath its scorn,
And soaring past the same with strength of wing,
As heaven or hell broke feathered from the string.

And so befell that, touching thus with man,
He needs must touch with woman, in the plan
Of the Creator made to soften down
Male strength with sweetness, and its power to crown
With gentleness of beauty feminine.
Oft had the wayward haunter of the pine,
Nearing young manhood's bourne of wingéd dreams,
Erewhile seen far askance, through rosy gleams
Of some enhaloing glory, visions pass
As 'twere of angels wedding mountain-grass
To kisses of their music-moving feet,
Till, grown prolific, in its issue sweet
Of blossom did it testify the love
It bore that angel pressure from above.
Oft had the sheen of maiden faces passed,
And from them quickening glories keen and fast,
That stabbed his heart with beauty, making bright
Its shadow with a shadow of delight
Bodied in human fashion to a flower
Of love's consummate splendour, breathing power
To shake all pulses of his being more
Than thundery tempests or the forest-roar.
Oft had the sound of maiden voices made —

When, brooding, near the village-green he strayed—
So clear a music, harmony so fine,
A soul of sound so like a thing divine,
That, for the spanning of a summer day,
On witchéd strings his softening mood might lay
No harsher tribute to a master-hand
Than silvern-rippling sounds of laughters planned
To echo music of the woman-tone.

And now, at earliest flush of manhood thrown—
With all the dews of youth upon his heart
To feed the founts of passion, and of art
A strong possession shaking all his soul,
That all its nether fountains burst control,
And set his heart a bubble on the spin
Of their great deeps of most melodious din—
Thrown so to sudden touch with womanhood,
Ere well aware did fire his throbbing blood
Through all its courses to a sudden flame,
Kindling gigantic raptures through his frame,
Fanned by the breathings of the destined maid
His heart who singled, and its pulses swayed.

And sooth, though but a mountain maid was she,
Bred in a lowly cottage, at the knee
Of rustic parents springing, reared to ways
Of homely labour through industrious days,
No fairer flower of virgin womanhood
E'er moved the earth to gladness, from a bud
Of beauty blowing to a perfect prime.
One such she was as God, at random time,
Alike in lowly station as in high,
From flowers of Eden culled ere sin could dry
All primal freshness and all pristine hue
From petals with a Godhead in the dew,
Doth seem of blossom all compact to build,

Still with a soul of Eden-fragrance filled.

Gentle she was as maidens still should be;
And of a whiteness of virginity
To blot the shaméd lily in compare;
Native to love as is to lips the air,
Or mother-milk to infant newly born;
As blithely fresh as is the dewy morn
When breathing summer kisses her awake
With breath of flowery softness. God did make
A special sunlight for her crowning hair,
Where many loves were tangled unaware;
And for her cheeks in bedded lily-mesh
Set blushing velvet roses Eden-fresh
And downy as an Eden-angel's wing;
And for her lips, twin roses, with a spring
Of Eden-music parted, which for bliss
Sang sweet hosannahs to their balmy kiss,
So praising Him the quickener of her breath.
And on her form it seemed as sin and death
Had left no impress, but a temple there
Was planned for Love's indwelling. Motion fair,
Blended to harmonies of art divine,
Was bodied in her limbs; and from the shine
Of her twinned lights a loveliness of love,
Indwelling through her Eden, ruled above
Her beauteous garden with a splendor chaste.
Simple her mind, untutored and ungraced
By any art, but graced by nature so
That finest culture well might fall below
Her virgin intuitions of the fine,
Which bred in her a culture all divine.
Not gifted with a genius, but imbued
With the full genius of a lovely mood,
Such as the man in woman seeketh most,
And such as forms the woman's proper boast—

Truly, a moral genius, making her,
In spiritual wise, interpreter
More skilled than man, to Godhead's holy heart,
Reversing lovelily her Eden part,
And drawing back the tempted one, who fell
To her temptation, from the snatch of hell.

Other, we know, in moral mould, was he,
The bridegroom of the tale. And outwardly
Did difference challenge with as loud a tongue.
For though of each the frame to grace was strung,
Such grace was his as of some panther fair—
A beauty with a menace latent there!
And dark he was of aspect; and his locks
Were as the shadow of the pine that shocks
The midnight of the Hartz with terrors dim.
And in his eyes not azure seraphim
Built heavens to shrine a Godhead sphered in calms,
And softening through a dew of prayerful balms;
But spirits of the lightning, girt around
With sable welkins shadowy and profound,
Glowing through inner deeps, shot bolted powers
Of passion in their tempest-wakened hours.

"Like draws to like" is true within the line
Of meet restriction; but the order fine
Of the Eternal Wisdom shapeth, too,
That contrast love its contrast, to a hue
Of new-born beauty blending, twain in one,
Distinctive souls when these together run.
So may the weaker from the stronger draw
A power; and this, by compensating law,
A tenderness from other not its own,
Till both be shaded to a kindred tone,
More fair in blend than either singly seen.

Who asks how love, two youthful hearts between,
Hath issue and a being? Whether chance—
The random wind of native circumstances—
Blowing around them, causeth so to press
The one to other, from a flower-caress
Drawing a spirit-birth of breathing love?
Or if, direct in plan from heaven above,
Twin hearts be moulded, a duality
Of single essence, quickening inwardly
With wingéd love, sprung thence a hovering grace,
The holy Spirit of the human race.

Howe'er it chance, betwixt the mountain maid
And him, the wild musician, soon was laid
An airy arch of rainbow sympathies—
Based deep in either heart—along whose dyes
Of soaring splendour midway met in heaven
Their climbing souls, by youthful passion driven
To reach the topmast of that loveliness;
Wherein the Love Supreme did smiling bless
For these a world of promise God-renewed,
And cleansed of evil with no worser flood
Than of the rosy fountains of the heart,
To which of beauteous hope such teemings start,
Dressing dull earth in Eden-hues again.
She, maiden-modest, from the ways of men
Walking in sweet reserve, and he, who made
By choice a dwelling in his genius' shade—
She, fine by nature past her sisterhood,
He, soaring o'er his fellows' lowly mood
Into transcendent heavens of ecstasy—
So fell that each in other found agree
A solitude that liked a solitude.
And either had a beauty: she, in mood
As of the holy angels true to love;
But he, like those who toppled from above,

Ere fall'n outright, though darkening to a fall.
And beauty draws to beauty: He, of all,
The Central Beauty, God the Holy One,
Through beauty swayeth souls to unison,
Winning by charm what still eludeth fear.
Then, in their mountain village forced so near
To labour, and in recreation thrown
So needfully together, so alone
From any other natures fit to be
Co-rivals in their fineness of degree—
Methinks, full easy in the mountain air,
Where blood is pregnant with the vigour there,
It was for these, so differing yet so like,
Through pulses tuned, the chord of love to strike.

Strike it they did, and each in proper tone.
For over her his spell of power was thrown,
Waking her virgin heart to dim alarms
As of some mighty presence girt with charms
Of terror for a garmenting, and fair
As splendid angels of the upper air,
Yet all as awful with a majesty.
The wherefore did her soul, on bended knee,
In maiden-wise with timid worship send
Faint looks of upward stealth to see him bend,
This wondrous stranger from another sphere,
O'er her, who inly prayed, with maiden fear
Of self-unworthiness, that he might see
No blemish mar her sweet virginity.

But he—as when a tempest from the height,
Spying a flowery meadow, plumes with might
His sounding pinions, and with heart of fire
Stoops to the bosom of his fair desire,
And rushing from his airy throne on high,
Softens his course of thunder, drawing nigh,

Yet, carried headlong with impetuous sweep,
Drops like the bolted levin from the steep,
And with his strenuous wings embraces round
His flowery lode-star, that it shakes astound,
Yet yields its hearted fragrance to his stress,
Sighing sweet terror to his fierce caress;
So brake the wild musician's soul on her,
Shaking her flowery maidhood to a stir
Of terror, but a terror passing sweet.

And so the days did flit with wingéd feet,
As every day a holy angel were,
With every beat of wing a pulse of prayer—
For holy is young passion; till was told
The oft-repeated tale, of varied mould,
Which man to woman loveth still to tell,
And which she trembles at, yet loveth well,
And, pleasure-quickened at the heart below,
Blossoms to roses through her virgin snow.

So were they wedded on this summer day,
At dewy blush of morn; and, wedding-gay,
The mountain dwellers on the village-green
Had laughed, and danced, and sung, and happy been,
And feasted royally on simple fare
Served to a gusting of the mountain air.

Most blithe of all, and gayest of the gay,
Had been the laughing bridegroom of the day.
His violin, still the mouthpiece of his heart,
Had ne'er before so winsomely of art
Translated for its master, in the tongue
Of softest music, thoughts so finely strung
To tenderness of perfect melody;
That all the hearers from their mountain glee
Instinctively were softened and refined

To mirthfulness more noble of its kind,
Wherein the smiles were kin to sunny tears.

And, for the bride, her bosom's fluttering fears
Shook her young heart like lightly-prisoned doves,
A startled brood of snowy virgin loves,
That panted from their prison to be free,
Yet trembled at the thought of liberty,
Fearful of fineless flight in heavens so wide,
And doubting if the wings, so straitly tied
So long by maiden fillets, might not brush
The breath of prohibition in their rush
Through holy airs and prohibitionless,
Whose joy of freedom they could faintly guess,
But, nowise realizing, feared the more.

Now sloped the westering sun, and, dipping o'er
The mountain's occidental shoulder, threw
A shadow 'gainst the orient. Singly two,
The bride and bridegroom, seated side by side
Amid the summer blossoms, scarce descried
The merry dancers they had left so late,
The dwindling of the dayshine's pomp and state,
The oversoaring mountains plumed with pine,
The green recess they habited, the shine
Of lowland forests drenched with sunset fire,
And, based thereon, and ever doming higher
To centre of the zenith overhead,
The most translucent heaven of light which shed
As 'twere a benediction from above,
Raining upon them from the heart of Love.
They saw each other only: she with eyes
That seemed to dream on distance, making prize,
Through sideward stealth, of all his manly grace,
Adoring, half, the image in his face
Of thronéd Power, and trembling at the same,

Each tremor a caress beyond all name.

While he, now turning full to where she sate,
A virgin wife, still throned upon the state
Of awful maidhood, felt of her no awe,
But in a storm of love let loose from law
Made all her paradise a prize to him,
In such fine frenzy as those seraphim
Who, (fablists say), from probate heaven were raught
By passion o'er a beauty dearly bought
At price of God in barter set to buy
Some lovely image of the Love on high.

But came a sudden waking from his trance:
Unawares, a shaft of sound with tenting lance
Had pricked him back to consciousness. He starts,
And, breaking from that rush of mingling hearts,
Falls back into the courses of a mood
Whose torrent-strength the peaks of solitude,
Far raised above his kind, so long had nurs.
Wan-grown, he turneth toward the Cave Accurst
Inside whose grisly gape of hideous jaw,
Down murky-throated blackness, breathing awe,
The Fell Musician—so did legend tell—
Sate ever, waking in the gorge of hell
A deadly music of potential woe,
Wherein the voices of the pit below
Were blended with far echoes of the song
Of upper realms of glory, forfeit long.

As, skyward from the lowlands taking way,
You fronted on the village, darkly lay
The Cave Accurst to left retreating deep
Through the seared bosom of a horrent steep,
Naked, and black, and beetling overhead,
And flinging down the shadow of a dread,

And glooming ghastly, like the Outcast One,
When, hurled from glory of the Upper Sun,
He lit upon destruction, and stood up
Under the Curse, and let his heavy top
Hang pondering o'er the horror at his feet.
Never a dweller in the mountain seat
Would pass that gape of blackness in the noon;
For, whisper ran, whoever heard attune
The Fell Musician his potential string
Of demoniséd music, save the king
Of men and demons held the mortal back,
The same, by dread compulsion, on the track
Of spirit-shaking sound must inly wend,
And either there to present Doom descend,
Or, coming forth again into the light,
Drag out a life possessed by evil might
Of evil powers to working of their will,
Till the end came—and left him Evil's still.

Thither the bridegroom turned a pallid stare
Of most unnatured ecstasy, aware
On sudden of a music flowing thence,
Such as his dreams, at highest eminence
Of topmost soaring into realms unknown,
Had touched not on its hem of awful tone.
Seemed as the lost archangel, laying bare
The heart-strings of his madness and despair,
Swept, with that touch of dreadful intellect
Whose mighty span the horrid fall not wrecked—
Leaving intact the mind, that this might so
Remain gigantic meter-out of woe
Against an equal glory flung away—
His stormy heart, surcharged with Doom for aye,
To awful utterance of his swaying thought,
And from despair and wrath a music wrought,
Deep as the pit with horror, yet thereto

With such a might perverted to so true
Antithesis of truth, so rapt above
Earth-levels to a nadir-height of love
Dragged adverse from its zenith, yet perforce
Suggesting love grown horror and remorse
Of archangelic stature, that, in sooth,
An ear unguarded, maddening from all truth,
And hearing heaven discorded to a hell,
Might have forgot, astounded in the mell,
That He who maketh heaven aright in Love,
With Wisdom softening His fair Power above,
Doth work in Power and Wisdom solely, *there*—
Two awful Faces to the pit laid bare,
While murdered Love, through shrouding horror seen,
Is trebly dread for that It might have been.

Such huge confusion seized the bridegroom now.
A Godlike voice seemed calling him! But how?
Godlike it was in power of uttering heart,
And Godlike in the wisdom of an art
Most dreadly masterful: but Godlike—no!—
In love, except in love reversed to woe,
And bearing hate a monstrous birth thereto,
An incest of the spirit!

Quivering through,
He started to his feet, and there, with hands
And eyes that yearned, he stood as one who stands
Expecting, to a potent-rounded spell,
Some visitant from the deep where spirits dwell,
Unknowing if the coming one, whose breath
Shakes all his being, liken life or death,
Fair as an angel of the Holy One,
Or dreadful as the prince of the undone,
Whose aspect is the open face of hell.

He threw his hands before him, as to tell
His heart its path lay yonder, where they stretched
As though a power were haling; and he fetched
Hard breath as one who meets a buffeting might
Of winds whose thew is of the tornade height,
The tamer of the forests; or as one
In deadlier grapple—where to be undone
Is ruin past the limit—with some strong
Colossus of the giant tribe of wrong,
Which, garmented with passion for a mail,
Seizes the soul in gripe all deadly-hale,
And wrestles for a dominance over God,
Who, fortressed badly in His shrine of sod,
Cheers up the lagging spirit due to Him,
Its sovran liege and clother-on-with-limb,
Too often sold to end the toil of pray,
And buy the fool's contentment of a day.

And such a war, in sooth, the bridegroom's soul
Shook throughly to its centre of control.
His master-passion, hurtled at his breast
With a full hell within it, bore from rest
Of poiséd base his spirit, tottering o'er
A gulf of dread unplumbing, whence the roar
Of an eternal torment, heard afar,
And thinning up to fineness, in the jar
And whirl of contest wildered him, that so
It seemed the voice no longer of a woe,
But of a nether paradise, wherein he,
Falling, and eating knowledge, straight should be
As God: and if a death he tasted—well,
Would not the prize be offset to a hell?
He knew himself defective in his art,
As every master knoweth while the heart,
In skill of technic utterance unfulfilled,
Stammers in the expression it would build

To outward shrining of the soul within.
But, scorning technic knowledge, he would win—
As the unmellowed master is most fain—
His harvest at the sowing of the grain,
And had not learned that herein time and God
Must work, as in the outcome of the sod,
Ere he might reap, or men be filled withal,
And that who soars at heaven attains a fall,
If yet not fully feathered in the wing.
And now, behold! he heard a master-string,
In dreadful kind, but masterful no less,
Summon him thence with darkly-hinted guess
At promise of a power he might control
By the light forfeit of—a bartered soul!
He heard, he shuddered, and he burned to buy.
But other voices held him. With a cry,
His heart rose up within him: and it cried—
"What! thou, the bridegroom of a virgin bride!
Thou, newly blest with Eden-liberty,
That not the shadow of the Knowledge-Tree
Shall darken love made innocent again,
Becloth'd with grace, that garb without a stain,
Which was the first, best, clothing of a bliss
By sin alone stript naked: thou, whose kiss
Hath scarcely sealed thee over to thy bride,
Flesh of her flesh, and heart her heart inside:
Thou, free to barter thus thyself away,
Who art no more thine own? Thou, who, this day—
Yea, but a minute gone—didst feel the sway
Of a new life, a nobler than the past,
Dawn in a graciousness of light at last,
Kissing thy sombre spirit to a hue
Of rosy hope as fair as it was new:
Thou, to plunge back into the shades again,
New-wed to woman, yet no more with men
To walk in happy converse true and free,

But fellow with the demons utterly!
And, for thy God, O mortal, what of Him?"

But here the voice within his heart grew dim,
Dwindling to thin and misty whisperings;
For here, alas! he had not tuned the strings
Of being to response articulate.
God was to him a far-off Power, a Fate,
A something vague, intangible, and vast,
The shadow of whose floating pinions cast
A sense of Being at its utmost reach
From distance unto distance—not for speech,
Or prayer, or palpable thought: a mighty Dread,
Flinging a shade of fear from far o'erhead—
Too far for any bridge of mortal love
To span the deep, and scale that Height above.

Defeat, in such a contest, runs before
The Adversary's foot, with open door
Waiting an easy conqueror, sure to win:
Who wears not God, his armour is too thin
For sledging buffets of the brawny foe.
And with the hapless bridegroom fared it so.
Wilder, more soul-enthralling, grew the strain
Which plucked him toward a darkness: in each vein
It raised a host against him, pushing hard,
With household treason, on his feeble guard.
Gasping for breath, low mutterings shook his lips:
His orbs did strain their bidding of eclipse.
One step he took, with faltering foot and slow;
Another, and more firmly; and "I go,"
Fell from his shuddering tongue.

But now the bride,
Who had beheld him rising from her side
With sudden looks distraught, and read the whole

Huge strife his face had written for his soul,
And from the dread direction of his glance,
Pierced to old tales of hideous circumstance,
Conjectured what an evil thing befell,
And saw the fiend-musician's master-spell
Working before her—though her virgin ear,
All finely tuned for heaven, no hell could hear—
The bride, upstarting from deserted place,
Laid timid hand—a last detaining grace
Provided by the Father for that hour—
Upon her recreant lover's. Like a flower,
She bended all her sweetness near to him,
Her roses changed to lilies, every limb
Throbbing a pulse of terror, and her breast
A white dove rudely frayed in love's young nest;
And, with a voice whose notes as throughly shook
As the sweet lips that uttered, and a look
Whose erewhile virgin bashfulness had grown
Half maidlike—wifelike—tenderness in tone
Of terror for the loved one—"O," she sighed,
"Whither away so late? The gloamingtide
Is dusking, and the Cave Accursed lies
Yonder: and *there* thou wouldst not!"

Had his eyes
But met her pleading loveliness of fear—
That fear of love so Godlike in its cheer,
So potent to a man in woman's face,
Confessing him her highest earthly grace,
And her his own twin being exquisite,
The garden for him of a pure delight,
Fashioned for him in semblance as of Love,
And voiceful with sweet echoes from above,
And all his own for thanking of the Lord,
If haply man should think Him worth a word!—
Had he but looked, perchance the tale at such

Had ended in the prologue. But her touch,
Though lightly kissing as a lily blown
To contact with its owner, and her tone,
Though sweet of sound as is the lily of breath,
Waked in his breast not love, but, underneath
Its tumult passion of insane desire,
The added tumult of a headstrong ire
At any check to passions free too long,
And anger such as mildest right in wrong
Is sure to waken if it bar the way
When this is bent on passage, yea or nay.
Grimly he stared with stony eyes before,
And rudely from her clasp his hand he tore,
And, setting teeth, "Away," he cried, "away!
The mighty music calls me! I obey!"
And, bounding fiercely, saw not where she fell,
But hurtled headlong for the throat of hell.

Under the shadow of the beetling crag
That grisly gape lay open: many a jag
Of splintered boulder set its bristling jaw
With snarling tusks of horror; and an awe
Of hideous blackness gorged the dragon-throat
Which led to entrails of a hell remote.
But now the inky air all alive
With most stupendous music, as did strive
The glutted pit to spew its throttling gloom,
And, swelling high against the bars of Doom,
Shook with its choking bulk to awful sound
Reverberating Justice clamped around
With wrath, and from blown discord taking tone
Of God's harmonious anger, sternly thrown
About, and strongly grasping, dissonance,
And crushing it to music.

If, perchance,

A fear did grip the madman pressing in,
No hold it had to stay him. When from sin
Fair love a lofty nature puts not back,
Small hope that fear will stay it on the track.
The baser nature crouches from the lash,
And finds in that deterring; but, more rash,
The nobler, once of love it burst the chain,
To straight destruction hurtles, by a pain
Of apprehended baseness winged the more
At every point of menace up to soar,
And feeling, madly, half absolved from wrong,
The more it plays at stake with hazard strong.

What way he passed, the madman never knew,
Nor what of horror from his stony view
Fell shattered in the dusky corridors,
Or splintered on his orbs from rugged floors,
Uprising at a vision petrifact,
And falling broken, or in cataract
Rained on his head from murky airs above,
Where heaven no longer vaulted him with love,
But the pit reeked, and thick a terror hung,
And vampire shadows through the gloom outswung.
He felt that such had been, but knew no more,
Till, in a blink of lid, did ope before
His thawing orbs, slow-melting back to sense,
The theatre of sound, the chamber whence
The Fell Musician from his stage of dread
Sent messengers of master-music, sped
To gather audience in his grisly hall,
Filled with potential voices of the Fall.

Deep in the blasted rock its seamy womb
Was rounded to a chamber quick with gloom
Of an infernal gesting; and therein,
At back of all, fell down with thunderous din

A rush of water from the vault above,
And vanished in abysmal deeps that clove
To horrid entrails of the deep below,
Till, hissing on the fires of nether woe,
It belched again in roaring steam from hell,
And rushing sound an exit none could tell,
To bear the curses of the damned abroad,
Vomited vainly at the face of God,
And missing Him by distance infinite.
The nearer side this gaping of affright,
A rocky throne, of most uncouth device—
All jagged with horrors, like a hellish ice
Congealed from Stuggian blackness by the breath
Of Doom, that fiery chill of endless death—
Upreared its bulk, thrown out upon the view
Against that rushing veil, forever new,
Of woven waters passing to the deep,
And stretching from the ceiling's vaulted steep
To where they vanished, as a sounding veil
Of tissued terror shaken by the gale
Of wrath to lightnings and to thunderings.
Here, as impaled upon the pinnaclings
Of frozen justice in horrific state—
That mocked the pride which would be wrongly great,
Enthroning rebel guilt on torment due—
The Fell Musician played, with bow which drew
From his dread instrument a heart of sound
That shook strange palpitations all around,
Throbbings of archangelic power in tone,
With archangelic nature overthrown;
A harmony of mighty intellect,
Whose music was forever jarred and wrecked
By moral hurricanoes thrown from poise
Of one-time heavenly altitudes, with noise
Of rushing horror hurtling for the deep.
So, ever out a harmony did sweep,

And, springing, from its birth was shattered back,
Yet ever grew through all the tornade-wrack.
'Twas music and a discord both in one,
The emanation of a power undone,
A master-mind that lorded over all
A heart beshattered in stupendous fall.

But what the form or face of him who played,
The mortal might not fathom. 'Twas a shade
Of most substantial horror; vague of line,
But horribly distinctive in design
Of evil personality; a knot
Of twisted dwarfish Gloom, whose inky blot
Of hideousness forever swelled and grew
To a Titanic growth of grisly thew,
And growing, ever dwindled and shrank in;
An awful Thing puffed big with bloating sin,
And crushed to straitest smallness by the same.
And, for the face, except its eyes of flame,
Which shone the windows of an inward hell—
Malice, and wrath, and woe no tongue may tell;
And hateful pride that would not learn to bend,
(Though forced its hideousness to comprehend),
But tried to dress its nakedness with sneers
That blistered it all over; awful fears,
That hid themselves in vauntings of despair;
And, burning slow through all, the thought aware
Of endless ages of eternities,
Enduring while the space-outwhelming seas
Of God's tremendous being swelled and grew
From Deep to Deep in workings ever new,
Where the slow moulding of a universe
Is but a moment pricked with action terse
Upon a widening dial in whose plan
The sphery ages count a second's span,
And the full round completed starts anew

In endless sweeps of Godhead quickening through—
But for those eyes of horror, all the face
Bristled with hoary gloom, suggesting grace
That sprouted to a graceless filthy fell
Of shaggy vileness rooted in a hell.

While still with grouping orbs the bridegroom sought
To make that Evil palpable to thought,
Behold! a voice that clave the dread eclipse,
Made issue awful from invisible lips,
Which syllabled the throbbing music through,
As that had grown articulate, till it drew
From human speech a semblance quick with hell.

"Lo, now! who visits the Musician Fell,
The master in discourse of lovely sound?
Stand forth, I pray thee, Godling, nor, astound,
Gape on an artist brother. Welcome home!
Long have I waited for thee: Lo, ye come!"

And, all the while, with master-hand he drew
The bow across the string that lived and knew
A torture 'neath the touch, and echoed it
With discord forced to harmonies which split
To most heart-quaking discords evermore,
The while a regnant spirit, brooding o'er,
Crushed harmony and discord to the key
Of a most dread and potent symphony.
So dread and potent that the listener there,
Hearing the voice, of all the taunt aware,
And writhing inly to it, yet subdued
By mastership in his artistic mood,
Shaping to speak with that, forgot his ire:
And out his answer flowed in words of fire.

"O mighty master, surely Lucifer,

The Morning Star, the Glory's minister,
Who hailed the Light arising, long ago!
Thou orb of potent song eclipsed in woe!
Teach me thine art, and fix a price upon,
And if I then refuse thee, say—'Begone.'"

Grimly the Fell Musician laughed through all
His sounding music. "Worthy of the Fall
Art thou, illustrious brother! Thou hadst soared
A ruffler 'gainst the Kingship man-adored,
And bravely broken wing against the Throne.
Teach thee mine art? But that is all mine own,
The essence of its being wholly mine,
My voice and hearted centre genuine.
Then if to thee myself I give away,
What less than thy self can the boon repay?
Wilt thou sign all thyself away to me,
If of mine art I give thee mastery?"

Pondered the wild musician in his heart,
Then spake his thought: "If therefore of thine art
Thou make me master, and I sign to thee,
How long shall I retain the mastery?"

And spake the Evil: "Lord not I of life.
Yet if Another thou adjure, the knife
That cuts thee free from vassalage so shall give
Long life and large. A master shalt thou live,
And reign for fifty years, and pass to me."

Then shuddered the musician! But to be
A signer of the bond—why, that was plain:
He sold himself—mortgaged his own domain.
But now—to sell his God! Why, either way,
He sold his God: but grossly thus for pay?
With no poor covering of a hoodwinked soul,

But eyes at large, that looked and saw the whole?
He could not do it: something held him back,
And struck him dumb, the while desire's fell rack
Disjointed all his thought, and strove to wring
Confession of the barter of his King.

"Thou wilt not?"—so the tempting voice went on.
"Thou wilt not? Wherefore, might I say 'Begone,'
And spurn thee from my presence. Yet, behold!
So like a brother art thou cast in mould,
That other terms I offer. Wilt thou give
Thine instrument for mine? So shalt thou live
A master yet through half a hundred years—
On one most small condition."

From his fears
Of forfeit art the mad musician broke,
And, hurling instant answer, straightway spoke:
"I give! Take thou, and thy condition name!"

"Then draw to me," that other. And he came,
And stood before the throne of hideous state,
And saw a horrid shine of eyes elate
With hell triumphant, while the dwarfed one grew
A giant gloom through gloom that crushed and drew
The Titan in, yet held him not at all,
Too small for him its grip crushed meanly small.

"Now, open ears, and hearken," That went on,
"My viol shalt thou take, and then begone,
And lord my viol in the face of men,
If, when thou close thy door on public ken,
My viol then may lord it over thee:
In the world's eye, thine all the mastery,
But there at home the instrument supreme."

Vague horrors, like the flittings of a dream,
Rose whirling o'er the listener's clouded mind:
He heard the words, but of the sense behind
Could only guess in shadow thick with kell.
And his heart whispered—"Nay, is this so well?
Holding a gift divine though unperfect,
To barter for an evil gift, unchecked
At the most central chamber of thy life,
Lording the home, the child unborn, the wife,
And thee, the house-bond, with a hellish sway?
Better to wait upon the harvest day
Of meted season, reaping proper grain,
Than buy a dragon's tooth, sow, and be slain."
But all the headstrong spirit in his blood
Cried out on any waiting, and made good
With stormy violence his prone overthrow;
And, spurning opposition, "Be it so,"
He stammered, hurling better thought away:
"Take thou, and give, and have no more delay!"

"I give! I take!" the evil voice replied;
And, stooping, like a sweep of pinions wide
Cast down in vast and dreadful shadowings,
As from a Pestilence's sailing wings,
Lowered the Dark One over him, with eyes
Where horror stithied red eternities
Of malice in a furnace of despair
Heated for all the ages; and aware
He was as of a shadowy hand that gave
And took, and of a laughter in the nave
Of that uncleanly womb, as though it knew
Some monstrous birth at issue to the view
Of heavens with veiléd faces. And he stood,
And all his hair through all his bristling blood
Did seem to make his life one prickly fell
Of horror—why, he knew not, knowing well,

And rapt into a deep unholy trance;
Until that laughter's shrieking dissonance,
(Eternity convulsed in hopeless mirth
Of agony at mad hysteric birth),
Did seem to lift him from the damnéd floor,
And hurl him flying down the corridor
Of lurking horrors.

And he waked, and saw,
And stood at gaping of the grisly maw,
Outside its dragon-snarlings. And, behind,
Far in the entrails, like a belching wind
That rumbled back from exit, gulped again,
The music, or the laughter, or the twain,
(Or were they one?) died sullenly away,
And dwindled from the levels of the day,
As with æonic yearnings. And, around,
Mountain, and sky, and lowland, slept profound,
And the white hamlet in its mountain nest,
'Neath flooding moonlight falling from a breast
Of moon as round and clear of argent sheen
As ever God did set with mothering mien
To nurse the darkness with a milk of light,
That so the sullen babe might wax all bright,
And glass the heavenly Glory on its face,
Confessing Him the Father of a grace.

But where the dark musician darkly stood,
No light was on him: overhead did brood
The beetling forehead of the demon crag,
O'ernodding evermore with heavy shag
Of gloom the horror it o'erstrode below;
A hideous brow that pondered on a woe
Crushing above, and yawning 'twixt its feet,
And whence was no escape and no retreat.

Gasping, he reeled from out the hellish shade,
And stumbled to a vantage which surveyed
The village-green, the place of bridal cheer.
But all was desolate: the moonlight clear
Looked blankly at him like an angel-face
That mutely questioned—in a holy place
Late desecrated, where it kept a guard—
The desecrator of the Eden-sword,
What he had done with consecrated bliss,
And how a joy stood nakedly like this,
And none to clothe its sorrow with a smile?
Whereat, he hung his head, and mused awhile,
And asked if this were dreamingtime or waking,
And if his heart exulting were or breaking?
And whether he had ever loved a maid,
And passioned o'er her virgin grace arrayed
In sinlessness of holy vows for him?
And if he had indeed in places dim
Bartered with hell? Or was it all a dream,
And would he wake, and find a happy gleam
Of morning twilight thinning night away,
And blushing rosy to the kiss of day—
As blushed the dream-bride to his bridegroom-kiss?

Then, something singing with a vibrant hiss
Made shock beside him. All his wrinkling heart
Drew in to smallness with the sickening smart
Of life contracted in a grip of dread;
And straightway up he bristled at the head;
And all the lids flew open of his eyes
Bursting abroad, to stare in mad surmise
Of what they knew not; and aside he sprung;
For truly he did think the Serpent's tongue
Had touched him, with a sibilance hot from hell.

And, looking down, his cracking eyeballs fell

To sight of what had happed. The violin
Had slipt his nerveless fingers, and with din
Of shaken chords had struck his nearer foot,
And bounded off, and fall'n, and now lay mute,
And, blinking up at him a horrid smile,
Sprawled on the earth as though it would defile
God's holy world for very wantonness—
To vile a seeming did the Thing express!

Awhile upon that same he stared aghast,
And all his soul was bloodless fear, which passed
Anon to sanguine fury. "Damnéd Thing,"
He cried, and straight, with arm at angry fling,
He snatched it to his hand, and gripped upon,
And spat from grinning teeth and lips blue-wan,
And shook the demon bantling, and stood still,
And stared again, and maddened: had the skill
Of archangelic lying cozened him,
Rending perhaps his genius limb from limb,
And handing back the carcase wracked and rent,
Like this sheer hulk of his own instrument?
For such it seeméd now on closer view—
His old-time violin, but o'erdrest anew
With senile aspect of decrepit power,
All laxed to weakness from the lusty hour
Of its full-throated bygone singing-time.
Battered it was, and wrinkled, with a rime
Of pallid tarnish on its puckered face;
And every string seemed slackened out from place:
But all beside, in bulk and build, made known,
Or seemed to make, the Thing his very own.

Convulsed, bewildered, and enraged at heart,
He struck it fiercely with his rod of art;
Whereat, a life, outcharmed from all the strings,
Did groan with so potential harrowings

Of woe immense, immeasurable pain,
And sounding fury countering all their grain,
That, on the instant, soul-dilate, he knew
He held the pole of all his aim in view,
And touched his upward limit of desire—
Or downward, as it might be—and stood higher—
Or lower—by vast circles of degrees,
Than any master in the harmonies,
Then making music to the souls of men.

Thereon, with heart a-flame, he heaved again
His wand of power, and, drawing o'er the strings
All his heart-throbbings and soul-frenzyings
Merged in the hurtling bow, a strain he woke
To slay the listening silence with a stroke
More potent than the levins's bolted flame;
Till all the steeps, soul-shaken by the same,
Shouted tremendous echo, and the night
Of shadows reeled beneath it, and the light
Drew-in its breath, and, gasping, waned to pale
And heart-contracted dimness, as did sail
The pinions of an Evil through the air,
Blotting with shadow God's clear presence there.

All time forgot, and whelmed all space away,
Singly his soul existent through a sway
Of sound that sphered an empire and domain
Absorbing self, wherethrough that self did reign
In likeness as of God, but evilly,
A sin-reversal of the Deity,
Inverting His fair order, where above
The throning Power and Wisdom swayeth Love—
As here did power, tyrannic grown of guise,
And evil wisdom, here no longer wise,
Make holy love itself a thrown to bear
The weight intolerable of Despair—

From the rapt passion of his central soul,
At stress of self-expression, did he roll
Round worlds of music, building high and wide
A universe of sound, wherein enskied,
His sum of being, hereto stifling pent,
Broke out as to its native firmament,
And, filling that, beheld himself exprest,
Full reproduction of his breathing breast.
For so the artist, Godlike, breathes abroad
Himself unto himself, as very God,
And, generating so himself, conceived
To fullness by himself, doth, all achieved
In mighty reproduction, live for aye,
Unlike the barren dwellers of a day.

But when his passion, stretched to utmost note,
Began to sing abroad with seraph-throat
The glory of the mystery of fair Love—
That Holy Spirit quickening God above,
And all the Godhead's vital fruit of womb—
Sudden before him oped the forfeit bloom
Of his marred Eden, bodied in the grace
Of that young bride the blossom of whose face,
So late, with fragrance of her maidhood's heart
Outbreathing softly through it, every part
Of all her being there proclaimed in sweet
His very own—a garden where no feet
Save his, and holy God's, might echo wake,
Where every echo lived for love's fair sake,
And was itself a virgin soul of love.

And, keenly countered by that truth, above
All semblance of his art supernally,
Fainted the strain from its crescendo key,
And, dropping instrument and bow, he fell
Weeping—such tears as weep the damned in hell.

What profit—so upbraided him the soul
He had so bartered for a demon's dole
Of paltry, passing, borrowed power in art—
What profit, that the language of the heart
He might express in fulness of the tone,
Feeding a joy for others, if his own—
Cheated of all the substance by its shade
And thinnest ghost of semblance, sound-arrayed—
Forever hungering, must forever be
Mocked by a bodiless show of harmony,
While love herself, though standing bodied nigh,
Eluded him by stretched infinity?
How could *he* clasp in holy love's caress
The body of a virgin holiness,
Feeling the while—O horror!—that his touch,
Contaminate with a demonhood, must smutch
The Purity of God enshrined in her—
Besoiling it with sacrilegious slur
Of an embracing vileness most unfit?

Over his prone head did the shadows flit,
Winging the night, and slowly sank the moon
Beyond her zenith-rising, ere, his swoon
Of thought and sense half-lifting, heavily
He gathered up his concrete misery,
The viol and the bow, from off the ground,
And slowly, stumbling, like a man astound
From some dread vision scantly passed away,
Whom the mechanic motion of the clay
Doth move unconscious to accustomed act,
His way he took across the silent tract,
Unpropled of its late festivity,
And, stealing by the hamlet guiltily—
For every darkened dwelling seemed an eye
Of vital horror as he passed it by—
Reached his own house, (O, not a home, alas!)

And pushed the yielding door, and in did pass,
And stood appalled before the darkness there,
And the loud silence—voicing his despair!

PART SECOND

'Mid other scene than of the mountain nest
Which nursed his stormy spirit at a breast
Of elemental music most divine—
In voice of tempest, and of singing pine,
Or the full forest's diapason roar,
Swelled double by the echoing mountains hoar—
Behold the demon-gifted master now.
He hath gone forth, and taught the world to bow
Before the lordship of an intellect
Itself sublime, and pouring out unchecked
Its fullness in the language of an art
Most potent o'er the fountains of the heart,
Swaying all these with poetry of sound,
Whose inarticulate a voice profound
Beyond the depth of speech articulates—
A voice as of the god-compelling Fates.
Princes and kings do feast him; queens to him
Incline their gracious sweetness, fine of limb;
Rude man is softened in his element;
And tender woman, gentle more of bent,
Loosens her lovely heart in liquid flow,
Beneath the witching of his wondrous bow:
While, there at home, unknown and love-denied,
Pineth the lone wife—still a virgin bride!

Not in her mountain home: in name, she stood
Full partner of his bed, and board, and blood.
Where wended he, beside him still she went,
Meekly in silence, almost heart-content
But thus to be his own—to know him near,
To see his presence, and his voice to hear,

Though roughened into rudeness this might be,
And the brow rugged which she loved to see.

Not heart-contented, either: that were more
Than love could compass, cheated of its store;
For though to love be sure a solid bliss,
Yet to be loved is complement to this,
Without the which, all love is solely pain—
Its loss most mighty in its greatest gain.
But, with that gracious love of womanhood,
Which finds its pleasure in the loved one's good,
O, still she had been happy, though her heart
Were breaking, could she deem her darling's art,
With all the triumphs of it, held a bliss
As high and pure for him as in the kiss
Of her true lips so gladly had been sealed.

Alas! no happiness did lend the field
Of his blown triumph any soul of sweet:
Its flowers were scentless to his trampling feet,
And barbed with many a point of thorny woe
Beneath the sterile splendour of their show.

When, on that night to evil set apart,
Returnéd home—where home was none—his heart
Had stood, as we have seen, appalled of mood,
To find love's resting-place by solitude
Usurped, and grisly darkness—pair obscene
Where love and lovely shadow should have been.

Thrusting away the cursed violin,
As therein he would thrust aside his sin,
With trembling hands a friendly light he struck,
And from its homely radiance sought to pluck
Into his lampless soul a fellowship
With something not of blackness. But the lip

Of every thing in that familiar place
Cried out upon him from an alien face
Of menace and upbraiding for a joy
Promised, and cozened from them. Many a toy
Of bridal ornament his own glad hand
Of late had fashioned, many a trifle planned
For brightening of as gentle eyes as e'er
Embraced a lover fondly mirrored there,
Cried—"Where is she for whom we were create?
Traitor to God and love, where is thy mate,
Without the whom our being lacks an aim,
And thine its complement?"

With brain a-flame,
And heart congealed to marble, thrusting wide
The door of the inner chamber, straight he spied,
All widowed and forlorn, the bridal bed,
Horridly vacant, as though late the dead
And breathless body of a love had thence
Been borne to earthy burial. With the sense
As of some dreadful murder scarcely done,
Whose site the pallid murderer fain would shun,
But, wildered and belated in the night,
Stumbles into the heart of his affright
With sudden shock, and stands a-gape, with knees
That totter, and a filméd eye which sees
Too well, yet all to ill, that place again,
Dread with the awful shadow of the slain:
So stood the bridegroom, staring on that bed,
Where murdered love, in horrid truth, lay dead—
The very vacance, where it should have been,
A most accusing ghost of awful mien;
Then, dashed the door its groaning frame into,
While on his brow burst out the chilly dew
Of agony and horror; and with stride
Disordered paced athwart from side to side

The outer chamber, till, exhaust, he fell
Prone on a bench, and—how, he ne'er could tell —
Lost, on a sudden, consciousness of woe,
In stupor of an utter overthrow.

And then, anon, he wakened. Lo! the night,
Bat-like, had vanished; and the leaden light
Of a loath dawning, pallid, chill, forlorn,
Ushered the breaking of another morn
To him, new-roused from unrefreshful rest—
His hot head pillowed on the cradling breast
Of her, the bride his hand had flung away,
When, late, from ruin fondly she would stay
Her lover, rushing headlong to a doom.

Yes, there she knelt beside him! And the bloom
Dyed her soft cheek for neighbouring so his own;
And her young arms, in bashful fondness thrown
Around his head, did seem to shrink affrayed
With all the lovely shyness of a maid,
Lest, in caressing, maidhood so might err,
Though love was now a lawful lord to her.
And the sweet breast, between whose buds at flower
His head lay pillowed in a lily bower,
With trembling swell did yearn as 'twere to him,
And, pressed upon by virgin terrors dim,
Sank in again, like fledglings fair to try
A flight of love, but frayed by love's large sky,
And cowering back into the mother-nest.
And, likewise, beaming o'er him, clear exprest
Her azure orbs the native speech of love,
But shaded down, by drooping lids above,
And sweeping lashes, to the undertone
And whisper of a language all their own.
From her ripe lips, half parted, fluttered out
The sweetness of her breathing, and about

The sable masses of his tangled hair
Hovered—a brood of young doves trembling there,
Full fain in kisses resting-place to find,
But far too timid for a rest so kind.
From all the garden of her maidenhood,
Her flowers of flesh, her purities of blood,
The singing pulses of her throbbing heart,
Her soul's sweet sighings, did a fragrance start,
So spiritual-fine beyond the sense,
That on his fevered mind a healing, thence
Distilled, seemed sanely settling; when, behold,
Ere he could speak, or, loosed from lilied fold,
Repay her fond embraces as he would,
What seemed a snarling laughter froze his blood—
A jangling burst of most discordant mirth,
Most mirthless in its essence; such a birth
Of hideous laughter as the pit may yield
O'er some new soul to dire destruction sealed.

Astound, he started from her circling arms;
While she, a flower upfolding fragrant charms,
Shrank close to him in terror, cleaving nigh,
And clinging to him. He with haggard eye
Probing that source of demon-merriment,
Lo! there the viol sprawled, malevolent,
Broad on its back in hellish attitude,
Whence up with crabbed eyes it glowered and skewed,
And puckered all its body to a smile
So foul, the outraged eye it did defile
In merely countering of so vile a thing.
Slipping to floor from where, at random fling,
The night gone by, his careless hand had thrust,
And sprawling endlong filthy in the dust,
From all its jarring strings had pealed that shout
Of shrill derisive laughter edged about
With barbéd shrieks of horrid agony

Striving to cloak a hell in sordid glee.
Alas for thee, vain bridegroom of a bride
Who ne'er may be thine own! Sweet love, denied
The first-fruits of its blessedness, the kiss
Wherewith the husband welcomes home his bliss—
Taking to heart God's love embodied in
A woman-beauty freed for him from sin—
Sweet love can surely never hold its stance
For one poor moment in that hellish glance
Which turns its holiness, with gibing sneer,
Into a monstrous vileness, fraught with fear—
(The greater for thy knowing that, indeed,
The vileness is not love's, but thine—the seed
To be expected of an evil sown).

For so befell that round his bride was thrown,
Upon the instant, not a light of love—
As, from the stretched wings of the Holy Dove,
One moment gone, reflect, had whitened her
A virgin purity without a slur—
But in its place (O monstrous lie perverse!)
The thunder-wingéd shadow of the Curse,
Painting her flower of fair young womanhood
As an unclean temptation of the blood,
A naked evil hardly shrouded o'er,
Where love did seem an evil evermore:
So as in Eden, where the fatal fruit,
Corrupting primal innocence, made shoot
Unholy fires of Sin through every vein,
Blotting sweet love with universal stain,
Lost Adam, gazing on his guilty spouse,
Saw all the beauty of her body house
A naked horror newly there conceived
In flesh and blood, of clothing grace bereaved.

But she, the mad musician's virgin bride,

In him conceived no evil: to his side
Clinging—the while he shrank from her apart,
As from contamination—all her heart
In terror of foreboding prophecy
Shuddering before that puckered sorcery
Of misbegotten art, the violin,
Quick with its vile suggestion of a sin
Bodied to shrivelled, naked hideousness—
Though knowing not the truth, yet none the less
Knowing enough to make her feel that *there,*
By some foul mystery, lurked a deadly snare
To take and rend her hearted joys of life—
She, with a heart all roused to ruddy strife
Of leaping throbs for terror, cried—"Alas!
What grisly thing is yon, whose features glass
Broad hell upon them, and the width of sin?
It seems—but sure 'tis not—thy violin.
It is some demon in the shape of him!"

Whereat, a fiend indeed in every limb
Seized hold upon the bridegroom, raging quick
That she to heart of horrid truth should prick
So close, through instinct of a heavenly mood,
Upbraiding all his evil with her good.

"Woman," he said, and frowning thrust away
Her clinging hold right roughly: "durst thou lay
Upon that thing I cherish most on earth
The blot and stigma of a demon birth?
If for the mouthpiece of thy husband's art—
The fountain whence my hopes of honour start—
Such be thy reverence shown, because, forsooth,
A jangling sound hath frayed thy foolish youth,
Small love to me, and little honour thence,
May I expect from one so stint of sense!"

And, striding over where the instrument
Lay prone, he seized in fury on its bent
And knotted neck, and, heaving up, with bow
Struck it across in anger. Straightway, lo!
As the bow flashed along the shrieking string,
Arose therefrom so dread a clamouring
Of keen deriding laughters, curses flung
As plain as words from off its vibrant tongue,
And hellish triumph o'er a dupe soul-bought,
Whose paltry rage a demon laughed to naught,
That, loosing it, and staggering back, he stared
Amazed, enraged, yet in his rage out-dared
By momentary fear, and all forgot
The tender heart, new-wedded to his lot,
He had so foully pierced with brutal words.

Brutal the words, indeed! As stabbing swords
They entered her young bosom, deadly-keen,
Slaying a thousand dreams of beauteous mien,
And tenting love, in that most tender heart,
With inward-rushing wounds of burning smart.
Dear God! her hand alone she had not given,
But heart and soul in all their opening heaven,
To him, exalting to heroic height
The thing she loved, and then in trembling flight
Pursuing it with thoughts of virgin wing,
That round her idol's feet in worshipping
Would fondly flutter, thinking almost sin
If yet more near his heart they fain might win,
Save as he deigned to lift them from below.
And now—so soon—still, still a maid—to know
Her idol all of clay, and not a god—
Built of the lowly framing of the sod,
Splenetic and unloving, rash and rude,
To her, who had for him no loveless mood!
She pressed her trembling hands tight o'er her breast,

And held its soles imprisoned 'neath the vest
Whose heaving swells spoke out, in every throe,
The wording of a heart-upheaving woe.
Trembled her lips in piteous droop and spring—
Love's sweet bow rudely jarred in haft and string;
While slowly up the azure of her eyes
From nether heavens of woe the tears took rise,
And, slowly filling, dropt, more salt than blood—
Her outraged heart of tender womanhood
Falling in each, and shattered in the fall!

Yet, none the less, that heart did cling, through all,
To him who so had spurned and trampled it;
And, with a piteous courage,—surely fit
To make good angels weep, who looked upon,—
'Gainst adverse thought did love, all deadly-wan,
Close to an instant grapple. He was right!
Foolish she was, and senseless was her fright:
And doubtless—so her piteous championship
Her love would buckler—she had sinned with lip,
Beyond the summing of her ignorance,
When, daring so to look with eye askance
Upon the instrument he loved so well,
She charged it with the birthright of a hell!
No wonder he was angered! And his words—
He did not mean them truly; they were curds
Of love's sweet milk clotted by acid ire;
Perchance to find *his* idol stood no higher,
But merely was indeed a silly maid,
By some poor sudden discord vainly frayed
To utterance of such words as might to him
Seem bulked upon with sacrilege's limb,
Though, in the simple truth's innocuous cheer,
But the weak infants of a harmless fear.

Yet, yet, alas!—her reason made reply—

Where went he yesternight? And whence, with eye
Distraught, and limbs that shook, now looked he so
On yonder snarling Thing, which, sure, to bow
Made hideous answer past the proper tone
Of any string to mortal music known?

As thus she stood in conflict with her heart,
The wretched bridegroom, who had stared, apart,
In horrid stupor, on the violin,
That foul embodiment of woful sin,
Now waking heavy from his nightmare trance,
Turned slow to her with bloodless countenance,
Wherein through fear and rage grew heavily
A downfaced shame for late crutality
Of anger hurtled at a head that still—
Whate'er might be the total of his ill,
Whate'er the dire perversion of a sense
Half-domonized already, drawing thence
From her pure beauty monstrous thought alone
Of impure ugliness around it thrown
By hellish glamour—was to him more dear
Than aught beside on which the sun's glad sphere
Laughed out for full content of charms as sweet
As e'er did God in beauty frame complete.
For surely he had loved her, and did love:
O, not with tender passion of the dove
Cleaving in softness to a milky breast
With kindred whiteness, such as should invest
That holy passion embleming the stress
Of spirit to its God, Whose heart no less
With tender strength of passion cleaving woos
The creature, covering it with holy hues
Of stainless Deity, and gathering-in
Beneath His wings, the loved one He would win
To utter sleeking on the breast divine,
Which still, the fount of love, for love doth pine.

No, not with such a love! Far rather, like
To an enamoured eagle, who may strike
To rending, in the fury of his bliss,
Rage in his love, and maiming in his kiss!
Yet love it was—the gentlest chord he knew
In all his scale of feeling; of a thew
Too fierce in essence for its tender kind,
But lending, natheless, to his stormy mind,
A portion of that summer habitude
Wherewith love tames the most tempestuous mood.
Moreover, through his being was there wove
The tissue of a greatness, such as strove
To clothe his stern perversity of might
With rugged generosities of light.
Base was he not; nor at his heart of heart
Ungentle in the essence: there did start
True wells of noble feeling deep within;
Else, had he lacked a genius. And to sin
Had he not bartered now his soul away,
Doubt not at all that love's most gentle sway
In time had toned his ruggedness of soul
To smoothness of a noble self-control,
Such as might mirror, in its clear expanse
Of God's high heaven the glorious countenance.

So, keenly smote him, now, a guilty heart,
As, facing her, his bride, he saw the smart
Of cruel words stab inward through her breast,
With pain the keener for being so represt.
An anguish drowned him in those swimming eyes
That strove to dam their fountains' salt supplies,
Rather than drop reproach unwillingly
On what they fondly worshipped. Faltering, he
Made stammering shift to clear his husky throat,
And sleek his rugged accents to a note
As nearly gentle as his tortured breast

Could launch to air from out so rough a nest.

"Nay, nay," he said, " pray, take not so to heart
That some ill haste of speech from lips did start:
The lip full easily may tune amiss,
When that the soul doth cheated stand of bliss,
As, God to witness, mine this morning doth.
But seat thee here, and say, if nothing loath,
How I did find me cradled in thine arms—
Too rude a freight to tax so tender charms."

"I came"—she said: then, choking, all her heart,
Which bravely had sustained the staggering smart
Of his ungentle rudeness, gave away
Fondly before his tenderness, with sway
Of rushing tears, through which—most pitiful!—
She strove with strength to smile, ere he might pull
New cause of anger from a weakness she—
For very joy of tender love that he
So far should soften—skilled not to repress,
Affrayed and charmed to exquisite distress.

And truly o'er his brow a cloud there swept;
But shame and nobler feeling voiceless kept
His jealous anger, making wrong surmise
At the sweet thing that fountained from her eyes.
He read not there the generous joy of love,
Shedding its heart a penitent above;
(Though, sooth, no penitent in thought of hers,
Except herself for self-imputed slurs
Upon the thing she loved with tenderness).
Rather, he read reproach: but, too, distress,
And fear—of him!—('twas only fear to wound),
So loudly spoke, so clearly were attuned,
In the sweet features she made haste to hide,
That strong reproach did hold his anger tied,

And branded him a most dishonoured man,
Abusing strength of manhood so to ban
The one fond heart which well he knew to be
So singly his—on which so lately he
Had pillowed been the while he knew it not,
By her whose feet to that accursed spot
Young love had guided where her treasure lay.

Therefore, he spake not to her, yea or nay;
But took her hand, and led her—shuddering keen
At touch of her as at some thing unclean!—
Unto a seat, and, sitting there-beside,
Waited in silence till her rushing tide
Of full emotion, swiftly curbed unspent,
Left her with breath to answer.

From the bent
Of her reluctant utterance, part he drew
Of what he aimed at; but its substance true,
In rounded bulk, she might not to him speak;
For that had been to stab him, and to wreak
New torments on a soul she saw too well
Already shadowed by a cloud of hell.
The wherefore, what her gentle lips did but
Hint in most softened fashion, closely shut
Over a hearted venom in the truth
She gently veiled upon for tender ruth,
Shall we more largely render.

When, heart-mad,
He tore him from her hand-clasp, and, to sad
And dreadful issue rushing, hurtled on
Whither a doom awaited, she, grown wan
And faint through all her blood, had sunk to ground,
A levelled lily by a stormy swound
Beaten to earth, unconscious of her woe.

Meanwhile, their friends not missed them, till the slow
And lengthening shadow, ushering night apace,
Had startled them aware of vacant place,
Where late the bride and bridegroom had been seen,
Seated together on the flowery green.
Then, vaguely frighted, had they looked around;
And lo! outstretched unbreathing on the ground,
The glimmering whiteness of the paly bride
Wan through the dusky gloaming they descried.
Whereon was consternation, whispering,
Dark hinted bode of some unnatured thing,
And many a stealthy look shot out askance
To where, within the steep's scarred countenance,
The Cave Accursed yawned with ebon throat.
Surely, a sound of music most remote
Re-echoed faintly to the shuddering air:
And where was he, the bridegroom? Was he *there*—
There in the bowels of that hidden hell
Whereof the hoary grindsires loved to tell,
But better loved to shun the environment?

Anon, the bride with freshening water sprent,
She oped her eyes, and slowly won to sense.
Which when they saw, with pressing vehemence
Of many an eager question, did they seek
The sources of her trouble. But to speak
Were him to damn forever in their eyes;
Wherefore, for only answer, heavy sighs
She gave them, and a silence on the theme
Of all their busy questing. But the stream
Of old belief and circumstantial fact,
The character of him whose deed they tracked,
His sudden disappearance, her deep swoon,
And, whether heard or fancied, 'neath the moon,
(Seeming to pale the planet with a dread),
That echo of a music—all things said

The very truth aloud without a tongue.

Straight were all thews of merriment there unstrung;
And huddling close together, shuddering-wise,
With many a hasty prayer at muttering rise
To startled lips, and many a fearful glance
Bent back o'er wary shoulder, lest, perchance,
Some horrid shape, from far below the tomb,
Might unawares steal on them through the gloom,
The simple mountaineers with heavy heart
Hasted to seek their dwellings, where, apart,
Each circled fireside heard low whisperings
That shocked the night with guess, to thick the springs
Of vital blood, o'er what the doom might be
Of that lost lord of recent revelry.

Home with the rest, perforce, had gone the bride:
But, while her parents sate the hearth beside,
In sad conjecture of the overthrow
Of all their simple dreamings in a woe
So fraught with probal horrors, she, alone,
Had crouched in heavy darkness, making moan
To heart of her o'er beauteous raptures slain,
And taxing still a sore-bewildered brain,
What thing it rested now for her to do.
And clear the *heart* made answer—dreadful, too,
But fixed to resolution, spite of dread.
She would seek out her love, alive or dead,
And snatch him from the roaring jaws of hell,
Though that should seek to hold him! Ne'er the spell
Of him, the Fell Musician, over love,
God-armoured on, a mastership should prove.
And though her heart to ice by chill affright
Congealed might be, and blasted all her sight
With horrors of the pit, God's holy grace,
Working through love, should yet from nadir-place

Render her back uninjured to the day,
With him she sought, if but the final "Nay"
Were left unspoken o'er her loved one's head.
And, that the word might *not be* utteréd,
She stormed God's citadel of loving heart
With such a rush of prayer as may upstart
Alone—to Him enthroned all hearts above—
Upon the hurricano-breath of love
At stretch of pleading, kindred in its tone
To His large heart, for one it loves alone.

But still while any wakened in the place,
She might not set her foot a path to trace
From which her friends would surely hold her back.
Wherefore, with heart whose woe did threat to crack
Its gentle tissue, burning did she wait,
Till, as the morning hours grew long and late,
All else, outweary, sunk to sleep at last,
Gliding with stealthy step, without she passed,
And stood some heavy moments pondering.
When, toward his house her vague eye wandering,
Behold! she saw a dim light shining there;
And drawing nigh, with many a fluttering prayer
Breaking in sweetness from her virgin breast —
Young birds of heaven, new-feathered from a nest
Of most delicious purities—the door
Softly she pressed, and, finding open, o'er
The silent threshold, sweetly trembling, passed,
Light as an angel from the starry vast,
And saw her truant lover where he lay,
Unware of her and all her heart did say.

And, sinking soft beside on rounded knee,
First up she threw to smiling Deity
Her hands enclasped, and her gentle eyes,
Her heart, her soul, and all their honeyed sighs

Of maidenly thanksgiving for a dread
Slain, and a live love she had feared gone dead.
After the which, with tender glances shy,
First stol'n at hazard from a sidelong eye,
But soon—as finding him so still and deep
Beyond all knowledge of her wrapt in sleep—
With a more open fondness brooding, o'er
Her treasure loss-enhancéd did she pore,
With all a loving maiden's hungry need
Of love unsatisfied, and fondly feed
Sweet sense and thought on him she yearnéd to.
Till, bolder grown, and having in her view
How most uneasily his head did lie
Pillowed on hardness, she—with startled eye,
And arms that trembled at their own rash act,
And bosom shaken by a cataract
Of beauteous terrors from her heart outpoured —
Drew to her breast the cheek of her prone lord,
And, softly fondling, sweetly cradled it,
And longed to kiss those lips the whence did flit
His sleeping breath so tantalising near;
But might not touch, for awful virgin fear,
Albeit in fact her wedded spouse was he.

And so she knelt, until her velvet knee,
For harshness of a most ungentle floor
That valued not its kisses, smarted sore;
Yet stir she would not, lest she so might break
That rest of one she longed yet feared to wake—
Nursing his sleep for his sake, yet (poor bride!)
Longing that he should know her by his side.

Such was the simple tale she told him there,
While yet the early morning flushed the air:
Such was her tale, but shorn of all to wound;
And yet so much she told, that inly swooned

His tortured soul to think how most unfit
Was he to be the end and aim of it,
The base receptor of a love too high
For aught unkindred to her own clear sky.
Deeply it sank, the barbed conviction, home,
And inly bit his heart, that, overcome,
Leaning his arms before him on the stance
Of his rude board, with bended countenance
Prone to their level, all his woe rushed out
In heart-uptuggings of a thunder-spout
Of fiery deluge, sluicing in its way
All fence of manhood utterly away.
Dreadful it is, when such as he do weep!
For then indeed the fountains of a Deep
Are shattered sudden at a single blow,
And, bursting monstrous out, an ocean-woe,
A shoreless agony diluvial,
Rending the heart asunder, doth appal,
As though the fountains of that heart did spout
In living blood at deluge bursting out!
O, sad to see are woman's tears at flow;
Yet they are mother-language of her woe,
In harmony with nature. Bitter more,
When some strong man, his heart o'erburdened sore,
Lets break its grief, in unaccustomed way,
An exit rude of eye-bescorching spray.
But when that such as he—most strong to feel,
Yet stronger to control, with grip of steel,
Emotion in the bosom—are o'erthrown,
High heaven! it is as though you saw laid prone
The lost archangel, loosing, where he fell,
His heart, surcharged with Doom, in flooding hell!

Bewildered, stunned, and horrified to core,
In vain the trembling bride did tax her lore
Of tender woman-soothings, if that she

Might light on any maiden sorcery
To charm the terror of this woe away.
In vain about his neck caressing lay
Her rounded arm; in vain she stroked his hair;
In vain, with cheek to his, close-nestling there,
She called him sweetheart and her bosom's joy,
Her breath of breast, her king, her own fair boy,
Her true, sweet husband, her delight and pride,
Heart of the heart he solely reigned inside.
In vain! He nowise heeded—unaware,
It truly seemed, of any presence there,
Save of the dreadful anguish of his soul.
Until, anon, by very stress of dole
Weakened and spent, his weeping thinned into
The fiery oozing of a briny dew,
And, clutching him at throat, some parting sob,
Wherein his bursting heart did seem to throb,
As seeking exit from a stifling place
Of strait imprisonment. At last, his face,
Bloodless and sunken as the face of one
A long day dead to any warmth of sun,
Raising, he turned on her, and spake—with tone
As hollow-strange as the dead lips might own.

"Hearken," he said," for here few words are best.
A curse hath come upon me! Never rest,
And never blessed joy, this heart may know:
Naught, save the burden of an endless woe.
That which is done, what boots it now to tell?
Think, in the sum, I stand at throat of hell,
But waiting ere it swallow me, accurst.
Not less, a weary time I linger, first—
A heavy time before a heavier time!
Ask me no more, and probe not thou my crime.
This only, while with honest speech I may—
This only, bride most hapless, would I say.

Never a husband may I make to thee,
Save in the hollow title—never be
One with thy being, blended with thy life,
Full spouse to thee, and thou to me full wife.
As soon as couch with thee, dread maiden, I
Would face to face pluck beard of Him On High!
For equal desecration would I hold,
To touch with love His love in living mould!
You Thing would call the damnéd up from hell,
Their laughter be our fittest wedding-bell,
Did I pollute, in sanctity of thine,
The outraged love of Love which is divine.
Wild thoughts! wild words! too late, too sanely, said,
And born too late, when hope itself is dead!
Wherefore, bethink thee well, and then decide.
Unwed thee can I not, unhappy bride:
But though 'tis thus, and I must hence away
From evil place, yet thou canst freely stay.
Full half of all I own shall aye be thine—
And soon it may be much. Annoy of mine
Ne'er shalt thou suffer, whatsoe'er thou will—
Yea, though thou wed anew, with happier skill!
Think well! think well! O, surely this were best—
That I should pass, and thou in safety rest.
Yet, if thou will, mayst wander at my side,
My wife in name, a widowed virgin-bride,
Subject to moods that madden as they spring,
And haunted by the face of yonder—Thing!
Again I say, think well! I leave thee now.
When I return, anon, then tell me how
Thou hast decided, and it so shall be."

And, snatching cap and viol, straightway he
Arose, and, rushing from his dwelling, fled
Into the haunted mountains high o'erhead.

Then, weeping heavy tears—O, not like his,
Yet bitter droppings o'er a murdered bliss—
The pale bride hid her face, and dropt to knee,
And childlike at the feet of Deity
Prayed for a light in darkness. And anon,
When day was spent, and gloamingtide drew on,
Far off she heard the well-remembered tread;
Whereat, her heart leaped up—then sank as lead.
And, when he entered, served she him with food,
And waited on, with sweet solicitude,
And looked so loving, and so lovely too,
His heart groaned inly, yearning at the view
Of all her tender grace and gentle mien;
And softly did she speak, with voice serene
Of simulated smoothness,—though, within,
Alas the day! her heart made heavy din
Of voiceless weepings,—touching on such themes
As might arouse her lord from heavy dreams;
Then, like a household angel, cleared the board,
And, all things ordered, waited on his word.

Heavily brooding, did he muse awhile,
With chin on breast, as one who would beguile
Time to some fleeting respite from a woe,
In stupor of a blankness dead to show
Of outer earth, and very life within.
And the night darkened; and, with voices thin,
The pines from off the summits sent below
Strange sobs and far-off whispers of a woe.
But softly when the evening lamp she lit,
The bridegroom, waking from his heavy fit,
Looked up, and, breaking silence long and chill,
"Thou hast," he said, "decided? Speak thy will."

Then, standing meek, in virgin dignity,
With linkéd hands downdrooping wistfully,

And lips that somewhat shook, as did the words
That kissed them into parting, (downy birds
Outflown through roses, and all sweet with breath
Of their blown blossom), softly thus she saith: —

"O, yes, my love, I have decided well!
Easy it is my duty here to tell;
Easy to tell the leaning of my heart,
And the true pleasure of it. If we part,
Not mine the act. I love thee! All is said
In that one word. I love thee! Thee I wed,
Freely, for worse, for better; gladly, too:
And canst thou think I now should prove untrue?
If woe be thine, at least shall I be near,
And, sharing, haply lessen. Have no fear,
Either, that I shall vex thee, or intrude
In any wise on thy withdrawing mood.
I will but fashion for thy daily needs,
And think me richly paid with any meeds
Of kindly thoughts thou deignest unto me,
Taking the same as very ample fee
For my poor tendance. Haply, an thou wilt,
By my fond smile some kindlier moments gilt,
May lend thy life a little shine of sun—
Perchance to widen ere our day be done:
Yet shalt thou have, or lack, my company,
Alway, O love, as seemeth best to thee.
Nor, if thou must divorce me from thy bed,
Deem yet that any 'Nay' shall here be said:
Love is not of the flesh, but verily
Pure spirit, glad alone when it may be
A source of pleasure to the thing it loves.
I have decided! Where my husband moves,
There wend I still, happy if near to him,
Or grieving only if *his* joy be dim."

She ceased; and slowly, through the thrilling air,
Reluctant silence, sinking, settled there,
But seemed at heart to sweetly tremble yet,
As o'er a music it would ne'er forget.
Sore groaned the wild musician from his soul.
"Dread God!" he cried, "for what a paltry dole
Have I thy choicest flavour flung away,
And in that madness damned myself for aye!"

PART THIRD

Behold him now the idol of the throng;
Courted and feasted—and alone among
The flatterers of his triumphs. Doubly so
Beneath his roof-tree, where a gathering woe
Made heavy presage to some swelling Doom,
Whose awful shadow volumed through the gloom.

For while, abroad from home, he lorded well
Alike his fellows and the Thing of hell,
Wringing from that a wizardry of art
Potent o'er all the powers of human heart—
Tender, sublime, or fearful, as he would,
The full-voiced breathing-out of every mood
Of most capacious genius stretched abroad
To amplest reach, a god-expressing god—
Not less, the moment he strode darkly in
O'er his own threshold, did the curse of sin,
The evil compact with a thing unclean,
Constrict all greatness to the very mien
Of him, the Fell Musician; that he stood
No house-lord, but a slave through all his blood
To most disordered madnesses of fear,
Rage, malice, and remorse without a tear.

Sometimes, through heavy hours, all broodingly
He sate alone—and none so lone as he,
Whom God ne'er neighboured in his solitude—
And glowered across, through dark and heavy mood,
At the vile feature of the Instrument
Placed there before him where his eyes' dark bent
Might hold it clearest in completed view,

And hurl back curses at the eyes a-skew
That seemed with leering gibe to mock his woe.
Sometimes in rage he seized it, and with throe
Of laboring fury strove to wring from it
A birth of music should attest him fit
To lord it here at home, as there without.
But ever, then, with most demoniac flout,
Mocking his fury, would the strings give back
So foul a discord as seemed ripe to crack
All sense of harmony forevermore
In any ear that listened: such a roar
Of deadly, horrid frenzy, such a din
Of nerve-beshattering shrieks with madness in
A guise of mirth tricked out by laughter fell;
Such evil-breathing boasts as of hell
Vaunting against the awful face of God,
Yet whining beastlike while His feet down-trod;
Such nameless births of most unseemly sound,
Suggesting, to the spirit struck astound,
So monstrous growths of evil gested in
The demon-quickening pitted gut of sin;
Such howls, such yells, such screams, of endless woe
Garbing itself upon with furious show;
Such taunts, revilings, blasphemies run mad;
So huge a knot of all things vile, and bad,
And hideous, drest with sound as with a frame;
That soon the fury of the man fell tame
Before the demon's, till, exhaust, would he
Hurl the vile Thing aside, and panting flee—
Though but to sin for refuge from the same.

Sometimes, again, would he, with desperate aim
To bury for a while his haunting woe,
Hide the dread viol and accursed bow.
In vain! Let hide them where he would, the air
Seemed blasted with their presence everywhere,

And at his ear most plainly out would sing
The horrid echo of the horrid Thing!

So, slowly did he fall from grace away.
Striving to drown his anguish, soon he lay
All open to a vice unknown before
In his young manhood. Many a festive door
Beckoned him in to feast, and song, and mirth,
'Neath roof-trees where he moved a lord of earth,
And, for the moment, lord of very hell:
And soon he found there was a juice to quell
Sorrow as with a Lethal draught of bliss.
So turnéd he unto the goblet's kiss
With ever-growing fondness; till, anon,
Not merely when he feasted did he con
Fair wine in crystal hearted, but, alone,
Drew it as fondly to him, till the tone
Of all his life grew wedded thereunto,
And, soul-besteeped in that most treacherous dew,
He grew a very slave to it, as well
As to the horrent instrument of hell.

Yet not a vulgar drunkard. Never he,
Descending, wallowed in the swinish lee
Of direful habit. Alway did he hold
His sense to full commanding; for his mould
Of earth-o'ersoaring genius shrank from fall
Into the lowness of the animal;
While, too, the potence of his mind was such,
That it could hold the whirling sense in clutch,
And find a joy in lording over it,
Where men of weaker mould had surely bit
The dust of utter wallowing overthrow.
A rapture 'twas to him to feel the glow
As of a godhead kindle every vein,
And flash electric splendours through his brain,

Where thought, expanding, widened vast and clear,
Boundlessly past the earthly atmosphere
Clipping more stunted natures, and rushed on
Circling and orbing into deeps unknown,
Where he, allured to vain imagining,
Did seem to sway alone, their sovereign king.
Moreover, as the witching influence stole
Thrilling to core of life, his heavy dole,
If not forgot, submergéd for a time,
Left him to float along some golden chime
Of summer seas that e'en assumed, perchance,
An added glamour from the drownéd glance
Of the huge horror spreaded there below,
Lending its foil of contrast to their glow.

Nay, more than this: the very violin
Did seem to sleek before him—to a sin
Capping his crime still slyly drawing on
Its victim farther from a virtue gone.
When, sense-besteeped with joys intoxicate,
Though strongly gripped by reason to the state,
In outer show, of sober feature, then,
Whether at home, or swaying hearts of men
In godlike exercise of ruling art,
Alike from that vile body out would start
A viler spirit garmented with guise
Of fair suggestions shaped to harmonize
With any evil gesting in his heart.
Under the bow, soft ravishments would start,
Singing, as sweetly as the choirs above,
Of all the passing loveliness of love;
Hinting how woman is a flower most fair,
Of whom the breath is rapture; how an air
Of most divine enthralling bliss doth part
From all her pores of whiteness, steeping heart,
And soul, and sense, in oceans of delight,

Where every wave with madness exquisite
Drenches the thirsty soul to ecstacy.
Whispering, how many loved him. He might be
Not lord of one, but many a fair domain,
Full Eden, or more sweet for lovely stain
Of such delicious sin as glorified
Itself with rapture of a thing denied—
And taken whether God spake yea or nay!

Why should he droop through all the glad heyday
Of blooming youth, poor captive to a dream,
Enslaved to one who was his woe supreme—
A barren virgin for the sake of her
Whose bloodless virtue cast on him such slur?
Nay, let him put forth hand, and pluck the fruit
That wooed him to enjoyment? If the root
And ending of his life must needs be hell,
Better to buy a pleasure than to sell
His soul away for every naught indeed!

O, such he often heard, and strove to heed,
But, striving, only failed forevermore.
His last of nobler nature, closing o'er
Its love of virgin days, tenaciously
Clung here to truth, and would not set him free.
She was his wife—O, still the virgin bride!
She was the better angel by his side,
The last thing heavenly still to him that clove,
With all the passion of a virgin love.
She was the last God-grace to him that fell,
And his last bulwark 'gainst an uttter hell.
Could he wrong *her*, who was to him so true?
Still tending on him with observance due;
Flying to him at any lightest call;
Observant of his will in things most small,
And meeting it with deed anticipate;

Bearing the heavy burden of her fate,
Her loveless days, her nights of widowhood,
The passive pining in her youthful blood,
With not a murmur, not one glance amiss—
Yea, with a face which would have looked a bliss,
Though all unfelt, yet feigned for his dear sake,
But that her lovely wisdom knew, to take
The semblance of a joy, where joy was none,
Were but to spoil a duty there o'erdone.
Nay, nay! He felt that, proved he false to her,
He so on very God should cast a slur
Of outraged purity dishonoured there
Where His white love had templed, dreadly fair.
And though—so hard to slay the nobler mood—
Full traitor to that outraged Lord he stood.
Yet shrank his soul from aught that needs must be
As wanton insult piled on injury,
And crushing from that soul its latest trace
Of God's high image, and His holy face.

Not less, although he knew her holiness,
And feared,—yea, loved it too (with inward stress,
Though all unconscious, clasping it to heart,
Deep in his central core of noblest part)—
Not less, I say, he *felt* it not at all,
But its opposing nadir. In his fall,
The senses of the soul had darkened been;
That she, of perfect purity a queen,
A most consummate flower of womanhood,
Where Love outblossomed clear in flesh and blood,
A, stainless maid, a passionate virgin saint,
Did seem to him o'ershadowed by some taint!
With other fair ones let him plan to sin;
He saw no vileness there the evil in:
But let his lightest thought in lawful love
Approach his spouse, at once the holy dove

Seemed grimed-upon with most unbeauteous stain!
He knew the vileness filled his proper vein;
But there, in her, no less, it seemed to flow,
Turning desire to shudders loath and low!

And, while he loved her in his heart of heart,
Grew slowly hence an anger on his part,
By her, poor maiden, fathomed not at all,
But wreaked on her at quickening interval;
Long time, alone in sullen looks and tones,
Bent brow, and flash of eye from fiery zones
Quick with the lightnings of a stormy mood;
Anon—as deeper down he sank from good,
And grew debased and hardened day by day—
In bitter words that wrung the bitter spray
To eyes o'erbrimming but in solitude,
Curbing their founts to sting no angry mood
In him whose downfall, with a breaking heart,
And rended soul, she watched in prayer apart.

God! how she stormed Thy citadel with prayer!
At morn, and noon, and eve, and when the air
Had cradled happier souls to gentle sleep,
O, still would she, with accents all a-weep,
Whether of lip or heart, cry out to Thee,
For mercy on her source of misery.
She lived, and moved, and had her breath, alone
To pray for him: her sum of life was thrown
With single strength to this most single end—
Mercy for him she loved! Her only trend
Of thought and effort still her loved one's good,
The only voice from out her solitude
That soared with sobbings to the Heart above,
Was still—"O, God, have mercy on my love!"

But evil moveth with a giant's pace.

At length, the master came to loathe her face—
Or deem he loath'd! In her most tender tone,
A latent aggravation, all his own,
He put, and seeking found it. In the grace
Of her least motion—in her lightest pace—
He hunted out some hidden hint for ire.
And, evermore, his anger worked the higher
Because he knew how foully 'twas unjust,
How vile a forfeiting of bygone trust,
How bad and base a black ingratitude
To all the sweetness heavened in her sweet mood.

And so, at last, a dreadful hour befell.
Returning late one night unto his hell—
For thus he called what should his home have been—
From banqueting with rufflers free of mien,
And such poor female things as fit with these,
(Perchance dubbed ladies in the sham degrees
Of foolish earth, but merely animal
Fair masks of filth to eyes celestial),
He, heated much beyond habitual tone,
(And that, at coolest, fiery), found alone,
On bended knee, his virgin spouse in prayer;
Who, on the sudden of his face aware,
In sweet confusion started to her feet,
And strove with tender look his eye to meet,
The while her own did shrink with inward fear
Of taunt habitual now on lips so dear.

Which fear—alas! he read it all too well—
Awoke in him straightway a rising hell.
She dare to taunt him with that shrinking look!
She fling upon his head a mute rebuke,
Weighted with wordless keen reproach to all
The depth and degradation of his fall!
She—ha! most like—thus ostentatiously

Pleading for him, the leper, on her knee,
And doubtless from her lofty sinless stance
Of righteous maidhood looking down askance
On him, her lord and owner!

Flinging down
The viol, with his brow at wrinkling frown,
Upsnarling lip, and dark eye flashing fire
Of glittering menace bolted by an ire
Phrenetic—"Slut!" he cried, " what meanest, ho!
By all this pious pantomine and show
Of prayer—belike for me, poor prodigal?
Thou milky fool! God's thunders crud thee all!
What dost thou here, that, absent from thy bed,
Thou needs must vex a soul distemperéd,
With silly antic of a sanctity
Thou flingest, traitress, in the face of me?
Speak up, I say! What wert thou doing there?
Come, tell me true the purport of thy prayer."

"Alas!" she sighed, "I did but pray for thee,
That God, of His sweet liberality,
Should bless thee still, and bless thee ever more."

"I knew it," wild he cried, "that thou wouldst soar
O'er me, thy lord, with ostentatious show
Of scornful pity for a thing so low!
Why dost thou shrink, white driveller, with such look
As though my daily word of right rebuke
Were uttered on thy body in a blow,
Taunting my manhood, minion, with a show
Of fear unbased by me in any act?
By heaven! but I will build a base of fact,
Whereon that thou may'st play at posturing,
When next it likes to flout me!"

And with fling
Of frantic arm aloft, and knotted fist,
He strode to smite her. Then, with arms uprist,
Wild eyes that wildly looked a maddened prayer,
And shrinking form that seemed to wither there,
As 'neath the blight of some most monstrous thing,
Beyond the dream of any crediting,
And breath that, sorely panting, shook her breast,
As though with plucking tug 'twould tear from rest,
And hurl through parted lips, the tortured soul
Breaking her body's fence of weak control,
As grown, itself, too big with bursting woe
She cried to him, in accents sobbing low:—

"O, strike not! strike me not, my love, my love!
Methinks *thy* blow would slay me! God above!
Look down on me, a most unhappy maid,
And him my heart adores, that not the shade
Of this most cruel deed his soul should blot,
Never to pass away, and be forgot."

O, one had thought the very fiend in hell
Had melted at the woe her looks did tell—
The awful terror of a soul that loves,
When, blotting heaven, sheer down upon it moves
The dreadful shadow of a menace dire
From the loved *one*—the horror of an ire
Like that of God the Lover darkening down,
O'er those He loves no more, with awful frown.
But he was mad, the master sin-distraught!
"What! fleering still?" he cried, and sternly raught
A cruel blow to fell her, hurtling in
On that fair head with fury and a din
Most horrible of battering flesh and bone
Wrecking a flesh more frail, yet all their own.

Down from the table slipt the Instrument,
And up from snarling strings the laughter sent
Of a full hell rejoicing; while, with shriek
As though a vulture rent with bloody beak
Her tender vitals, down she fell—the wife,
Most basely smitten in her house of life,
That brain which lived, alone, to think for him,
And—worse ten thousandfold!—the heart a-brim
With truest love to him who wrecked it now.
Headlong she fell, the white of her fair brow
Burst open by a fury in the hand
She loved at very smiting, while a strand
Of crimson, breaking through her lips apart,
Proclaimed aloud the rupture of her heart.

Then, all the horror of his soul awoke.
What, strike his love? What! with so fell a stroke?
The only thing he loved in heaven or earth!
The only thing that loved him! Her, whose worth,
Set in the balance, would have tilted beam
Against a thousand sisters! Her, whose dream,
Below her God, was singly he, her spouse!
With such a cry as startled all the house
To shuddering panic, down he dropt on knee
Beside the breathless form deliriously;
Lifted the bleeding head, and laid to breast;
And kissed, and called by name, one ne'er caressed,
Before, without response the most divine
Of quickest love—ah, me! so long a-pine
For any food of fondness meet for it,
And now beyond its knowledge, when alit
So late, so uselessly, alas! alas!

So, when, with pallid faces, in did pass
The crowding, scared domestics, him they found
Kneeling with her in arms, as one astound—

Or frantic, rather: kissing her on lip,
And cheek, and brow, all over, while the drip
Of her sweet blood adown her breast made stain;
And, where he kissed, the crimson of her vein,
Dabbling his lip from ashen lip of her,
Cried out aloud, and dubbed him murderer!

Water they brought, and bath'd her bleeding brow;
And he, all ghastly gone, and silent now,
Still held her softly hugged against his breast,
And stared with stony eye, whose orb exprest
No cognisance of any save of her.
And lo! anon, with faint and fluttering stir,
Her white lids opened, and, with upward eyes,
She saw him bending o'er her. Then, surprise
Did seem a moment o'er her sense to cling,
Growing, as round her now she marked that ring
Of startled faces pressing: till, at last,
Some vague remembrance o'er her features passed;
And, raising soft her swimming eyes to him,
And smiling up through death-shades gathering dim,
She made her latest act of love—e'en then
Groping to shield her lord from blame of men.

"O kind caressing hands! Alas, I fell;
And he full sweetly propt me. Now, farewell,
Most dearest husband of my single love:
I go to spread thy couch in bowers above.
How dark it grows! Remember, Lord of Light,
To hold my darling in Thy radiant sight."

So whispering low, half witless what she said,
She breath'd her latest sweetness. Drooped her head
Back o'er his propping arm, and from her eye,
That strove to smile, the tender light did die;
Fluttered her limbs one moment, as a bird

When stricken by the hunter; faintly stirred
Her gentle bosom with the final breath;
And then the virgin spouse lay still in death.

He did not move, but stared full vacantly,
As one who sees, yet knows not if he see.
Nor looked he now on *her,* but straight before,
As out athwart a sea without a shore.
No need on her to look! He saw her *there*—
All round the ocean of his huge despair.
He saw her there, alive in gentle deeds;
In tender words; in love for love that pleads
Through act and look more eloquent than the tongue;
In all the sunshine of her beauty young,
When first, long since, he taught her how to smile
As maidens will when lovers do beguile;
In blushing charm, as on the bridal morn,
When new to God an Eden pair were born
Of lovers purely privileged over sin;
In bashful joy, as when she held him in
Her fluttering breast that second morningtime—
The one true heart still cleaving past his crime;
In lovely faith, as when she vowed to wend
With him through good and evil—aye his friend,
If not his spouse in fullness might she stand;
In patient tenderness of heart and hand,
As still, since then, forever had she been
His humble handmaid, though in right his queen.
He saw her as she trembled, e'en but now,
Before the horror of his knotted brow
And lifted hand of wrath—and well he knew,
With pang that tore his bosom through and through,
'Twas not the blow, 'twas not the blow she feared,
But the broad brand it surely must have seared
On her sweet heart, had that survived the blow.
And then those parting words, at issue low

From pallid lips that, dying, still did smile,
Cloaking his crime with most transparent wile:
"O, kind caressing hands!"—her broken heart
Forgetting—God!—the blow that cleft apart,
Forgetting all, in joy at one caress,
And her last sob a prayer that still would bless!

"What! Is she *dead?*" with sudden voice he cried,
So as the lost archangel, when he spied
The fullness of a heaven in overthrow,
May dread have vented horrid voice of woe.
Then, softly letting slip to floor the dead,
Upbounded he, and from the chamber fled,
And from the house, and from the haunt of men,
But clutching fiercely in his grasp again
The not forgotten source of all his sin—
The Thing of hell, the demon violin!

What after happed, was like a heavy dream
But fitfully remembered: gloom and gleam
Of night and day, as eyeless on he hied
To some dim goal but brokenly discried;
The sheen of sun o'er unfrequented ways;
The glint of stars above a weary maze
Of heavy wanderings on by paths obscure;
The dubious wonder of some cotter poor,
Who gave, for little price, the little food
Exhausted nature needed: till he stood
Outspent one evening in a savage glen,
And so as one from trance to struggling ken
Winning a heavy way, 'gan feel that here
His goal of destiny was drawing near.
For in this glen, o'er which the horror hung
Of some dread tale by many a whispering tongue
Told in the gloamingtide at ruddy fire,
While wife to husband clung, and child to sire—

Here, in this glen, long since—O Christ, how long!—
While all his stormy heart of youth, a-throng
With growing tempest, poured itself abroad
To awful deeps by awful music awed—
Here had he oft, at heart of black affright,
Unfrayed by spectral tale, or haunted night,
Poured all the yearnings of his soul to air—
Not from the hellish Thing low-crouching there,
Now, at his foot, and puckering to a smile
Which did the holy eveningtide defile!

Why had he here returned? He scarce could say;
For faint he was, and dazed. But darkling lay
Some purpose, yet ungested, in the womb
Of heavy thought, from out whose web of gloom
It slowly gathered life and form that grew
To dubious definition on the view
Of his spent soul, too tired for questioning.
Haggard he was, and worn, and with the ring
Of heavy woe around his heavy eyes,
That drooped stark lids to closing. Reeled the skies,
And heaved the earth beneath his fainting tread,
And down he dropt, as one a-swoon or dead,
Beneath the shadow of a giant pine,
And breath'd full heavily, and lay supine,
And fell on sleep, and, slumbering, dreamed a dream.

He thought that still he saw the evening beam
Lengthen around him from the setting sun,
Till dusk above the earth began to run
In shadow from the bases of the trees
That spake in sobbings to a plaining breeze.
And up to heaven, anon, he cast his eyes:
When lo! with blinding of a dread surprise,
The cope was rent, and, shining far above,
Enthroned in awful Wisdom, Power and Love,

The Godhead sate, and round Them, wing on wing,
A myriad beauteous shapes at minist'ring.
With straining eye, the dreamer strove to trace
That awful Majesty in form and face,
And saw outshine the Glory's single light
In triple grace of body exquisite—
A King and Queen, and thereunto a King
Bosomed by Both, and Both embosoming
With like embrace in form of King or Queen,
As He to Either wed a spousal mien:
Twain blent to One, That Third revert to Them;
All Three distinct, yet each the rounded gem
Of Godhead; for the Three a perfect One.
And round about did sweep, and soar, and run,
Those myriad shapes of beauty and delight,
All minist'ring to raptures exquisite,
And inly bath'd by these at ocean-flood,
That all was as one body, by a blood
Of selfsame ecstasy bedrenched and moved,
Each loved by all, and all by each beloved.
Then came and stood a form before the Throne;
Whereat, did swell the dreamer's bosom-zone
Huge dread, and bitter yearning. For he knew
His murdered love—on earth forever true;
But surely, yond in heaven, an awful foe,
Who now stood up to claim eternal woe
In meted justice on a traitor's head!
Then spake the Voice of God, as, finely shed,
When fragrant airs do stir the summer woods,
Sweet murmurs flood the thrilling solitudes—
So softened down by distance came the tone:

"Why art thou sad, Our daughter? Thou alone
With eyes unglad in this Our Paradise?
Speak, that thy Parent kiss from weeping eyes
All tears and sorrow utterly away."

And the bright shape made answer:—"Father, say,
And Mother, and my Brother, can it be
That love shall love forget, while ope to Thee
Lies yet the path repentance leadeth by,
For love's twin self, to this Thy Joy on high?"

And sweet the Voice made answer:—"Surely, no!
Speak freely out the heart of all thy woe
To Us, thy God, the Lover Crucified,
Who, hated much, for love of haters died."

Then she:—"Behold! a complement I had,
Life of my life, and heart of heart. If sad
I seem in heaven, O deem it, Thou, no sin!
For solely am I sad that I may win
Pity and pardon to my self below,
Trammelled by deadly sin, and damned in woe."

And then the Voice:—"Lo! well We know they heart.
Pass, if thou will, and to the earth depart,
And ask thy lover why he prayeth not.
Is God so poor that of a stinted lot
He find no mercy for a soul that sues,
Though it were Satan claimed the mercy-dues?"

Then, like a rudded rose, all heaven did blush,
And breath'd most fragrant music through the flush,
As from innumerable hearts outflowed,
Attesting all their sweetness of abode.
While, with a cry that, like a silver flute
Rang softly out, (through all that sweet salute),
Clear thanks and praises, prayer and worshipping,
Down through the rosy air that radiant thing
Did stoop above the dreamer where he lay,
And o'er him poised on wings of golden spray:
And, bending, till her lips at touch with his

Made all her speech the honey of a kiss,
"My love," she sighed, "behold what thing is love,
That clingeth still to earth in heaven above!
O now, my lover, while it yet is day,
Awake from sin, and teach thy heart to pray!
So shalt thou rise, and win thy Bride above.
Full easy is it, sweet, to pray to Love."

And with the shock of transport in her kiss
He waked. Through all his blood a new-born bliss
Flowed, softening all its ways of liquid flame
To tenderness of most unshameful shame,
And most entrancing sorrow. To his knees
Arising, there in shadow of the trees
He raised his kindling eyes, and saw, above,
The dawning stars, as very eyes of love
Wooing him to repentance. Then, his head
Low-bended on his bosom, "O," he said,
"Father, have pity on Thine erring son,
The guiltiest, and most fall'n, and most undone,
But not despairing longer of Thy grace."
And straightway all his woe from prison-place
Was loosened, and with hands before his eyes,
He wept away that bulk of agonies
Which, swelling long within his heart, had grown
Almost to cracking of its tortured zone.

And softly from the whispering trees there fell,
And softly from the earth there seemed to swell,
Sweet voices of a gladness past the earth;
And fair in heaven, with most auspicious birth
Of lovely light, a round moon from the shroud
On sudden started of a passing cloud,
And poured a milk of glory from the breast
Of mothering heavens, to darkness newly blest,
Transmuting all the habit of its cheer

To kindred fairness with its foster clear.

Long time the sobbing master knelt and wept;
But when, adown, the silver splendour crept
With straighter lancing to the heart of shade,
He rose to feet. Still in his features prayed
A soul resolved upon some lofty thing,
And from his form did seem to sprout a wing
Of growing greatness, truly great at last.
One other look aloft to heaven he cast;
Then, bending o'er the demon violin—
Which, thereunto, had cowered, all shrunk of skin,
And bleared of eye, with malice in its look,
And hellish rage outsnarling 'gainst rebuke,
Yet tied of tongue as' twere by strangling fear —
He gripped its knotty neck, and down did peer,
And, lifting, spat upon it, and stood up,
And moving strode, and from the rugged cup
Of the deep glen ascending, made his way
Athwart the woodland silvered by the ray,
As one who treads a pointed place unto;
Until, anon, emerged to open view,
He stood upon the bald and beetling brow
That overhung the mouth of hell below.

Forth looked he then. Beneath him, in the shade,
Slumbered the hamlet where his own dear maid
And he had learnt to love: her home was there!
He marked it from his vantage. Everywhere,
The old familiar slopes, all shagged with pine,
Were round about him; and, afar, the line
Of lowland forest, whitened in the moon,
Broke, as a surf around a deep lagoon,
Against the clear horizon. Out on high,
The starry systems swept, and to the eye
Made music, in a harmonizing round

Of tunéd glory, through the deeps profound:
While, full and sheen, a perfect breast of peace,
The mothering moon, with never stint or cease,
Poured out her heavenly milk into the night,
Nursing the unweaned darkness heavenly bright.

Then lifted up the master hand to heaven,
And, "Lo!" he said, "All-Father, Thou hast given
That I, repentant, here should find my feet
Upon the threshold of a lost retreat.
Erst, in the evil places hid below,
I sold myself to Sin. I do forego
Mine evil bargain. Of those fifty years—
Æons of sorrow salt with hearted tears!—
I claim not any balance. If to Thee
Forfeit my life when null the bond shall be,
Take Thou, the Holy—but in mercy take,
Absolving me for Thy dead Jesu's sake,
Or if, atoning, heavy years of woe
Still must I drag in penance here below,
O, yet not years of woe, though filled with pain,
If this my tarnished soul they white again,
And give me, at the last, to find, above,
Where Love doth reign, my long-lost joy and love!"

Then, clutching on the viol, "Rests," he said,
"One last atonement for an evil dead.
Thine art of hell, O Fiend, I render back,
And thus the sinews of thy music crack,
That mortal man be never witched again
To dole and doom by that unhallowed strain."

So said, the blinking violin God-accurst
He thrust beneath his foot; when straight it burst
Free of his clutch, and, swelling, gripped him round
With knotted arms from grisly gloom unwound!

"Ho, ho!" It cried; "rude treatment this, meseems,
For an old friend! Wake, driveller, from thy dreams!
Thou sue for pardon—thou, the slave of hell!
As soon may Satan with the Highest dwell!
Back to thy compact, ere I drag thee down
Before thy time, and leave thy body strown,
A dabbling filth, upon the fangs below
That bristle round the snarling jaws of woe,
The while I hale thy soul alive to hell,
There with like roistering blades to howl and dwell!"

But all the manhood of the master's heart
Rose straightway up to meet that staggering smart
Of unexpected terror. "Dog," he said,
"And thinkest thou with paltry shows of dread
To scare me back a traitor to my love,
Myself, my hope new-born, and God above?
Thou drag *me* down! By God On High I swear,
So grant He, now, a strength unto my prayer,
That thee will I drag down and shatter still,
Beyond repair of thy damned master's skill,
Full little recking if my body break,
And free the soul thou canst no longer take!"

With wrestling sway he swung the Dread around,
And crushed it in, and heaved it clear of ground,
And strove to fling in air; but close it clung,
And won to earth, and round the master swung,
Hard-gripping home to fling in turn: and so
Dizzily reeled the combat to and fro.
Round and around they spun in giddy ring
Upon the frowning height, until, the Thing
Still clutching close the man, over they fell.
Whereon, from That went up a deadly yell
Of malice mocked by utter overthrow.
But the musician, clinched upon his foe,

Laughed out aloud in air, as down they went
Headlong from toppling poise in sheer descent.
And then a crash. And then the night was still.

They found him on the morrow. Mark of ill
Was none upon his body; and his face
Was placid with the sweetness of a grace
Such as it had not owned in bygone years—
So sweet, that whoso looked was moved to tears.

"Surely," they said, "this sinner did not die
Within the awful frown of God Most High.
Surely, he sinned; but surely now in heaven
He smiles as one who, sorrowing, was forgiven."

L. of C.

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